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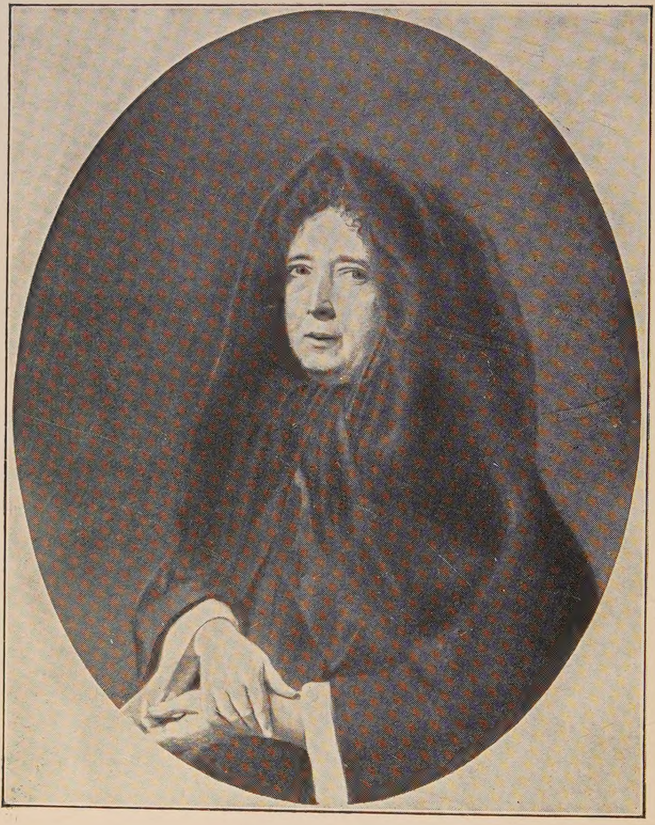

Maintenon

Madame De Maintenon

BY

MME. SAINT-RENÉ TAILLANDIER

TRANSLATED BY LADY MARY LOYD

PREFACE BY PAUL BOURGET

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PREFACE

Madame and My Friend,

Most heartily do I thank you for allowing me to see the proofs of your remarkable book on Madame de Maintenon. I have just read them, and my mind is full of the thought of the delight this psychological study, perfect in its fidelity and subtlety, would have been to your uncle, Monsieur Taine, who himself loved and practised, in so superior a fashion, that most splendid and difficult art of portraiture, historical or literary. But can the former of these two be differentiated from the latter? Does not the artist who discovers, in a writer's talent, that which the author of *l'Intelligence* denominated the "*génératives*" dive down into the most secret and living depths of the individual who manifests himself through the medium of any work of art? And is it not this point, the most hidden, the most instinct with life of all, that the great historian discovers in the actions of the warrior or the statesman? Whether the individual described be a Balzac or a Napoleon, a Swift or a Danton, a Byron or a Robespierre, the method must always be identical. Why these names come naturally to my pen, you will easily understand! To your memory, as to mine, they recall some of the finest pages of the *Essais de Critique et d'Histoire*, of the *Littérature Anglaise*, of the *Origines*—all of them instinct with the same idea: that properly to reproduce a life, we must think of it in relation to its causes, and that this quest for causes must depend on the establishment and setting in order of a series of small facts, duly surveyed and classified. "Small genuine facts,"—how often have I heard those words from your uncle's lips, and spoken always with that intellectual ardour noticeable in him till the very end of his days! A modest formula, indeed, but how far-reaching, when we ponder it!

This method of psychological analysis founded on small facts you have applied, with the happiest results, to one of the most celebrated, and, even at the present day, one of the most enigmatic personalities of our Seventeenth Century, and that in a manner so simple and natural that nowhere (and here your originality comes in) does the didactic structure meet the eye. One after the other you conjure up before us, with the moral physiognomy due to hereditary influence, yet coloured always by that of the surroundings in which the stupendous contrasts of her varying destinies were to place her, the grandchild of the tragic Agrippa d'Aubigné, torn between parents of different faiths, the acknowledged wife of the deformed poet Scarron, the secret spouse of the superb Louis XIV. These surroundings you reconstitute after Taine's own method, as I have just defined it, but with such a sense of the value and significance of each detail that your collection of "small genuine facts" is endued with a two-fold importance. They explain your central figure, and they throw light on a fragment of her Century. A similar method was followed by certain painters of the Renaissance period, when they introduced into the backgrounds of their portraits the familiar horizon of the locality in which the person who was their model had lived, and reached maturity. My thoughts turn to that famous apartment at Brescia, on the walls of which Moretto has depicted the ladies of the Martinengo family. They are seated at a distance from each other on a stone balustrade, covered, where they are placed, with an Oriental carpet. Their feet and legs hang over the side we cannot see, so that their faces and busts alone are shown—a masterly arrangement which has permitted the painter to impart still more individuality to his figures by accentuating the light on their features, and the gestures habitual to each. One fondles a pet animal, her little dog. Another toys with a feather fan. This one handles a red carnation. This one, again, wears a rose-coloured gown slashed with white: her neighbour is garbed in yellow with green embroideries. Behind each lady the garden of her country house stretches away, and the mansion, too, appears, with its own architecture, and its own landscape about it, plain or mountain, running water or forest. What intense reality does each of these portraits gain from this juxtaposition of the countenance and its own atmosphere, the human being and her dwelling! I was conscious of a quite similar impression as I gazed, in your company, at the future foundress of Saint-Cyr—a little girl, first of all, in the gloomy Huguenot tower of Mursay, flanked by its eight impregnable turrets; then, grown taller, in the Ursuline Convent of the Faubourg Sainte-Anne, disputing over her first religion, and giving way at last; later yet, in poor Scarron's literary *salon*, where the cripple kept his dispensary of wit, between "Ninon, who played the philosopher, and Academicians who played the coquette;" next, a widow, installed in that spacious and beautiful house in the Rue de Vaugirard, where, in deep secrecy, she brings up the children of Madame de Montespan—the fruit, twice told, of an adulterous intercourse; then at Versailles, where, seated in her alcove, she receives the visits of the King; and last of all at Saint-Cyr, where, after she had passed away, her corpse, robed in black garments, was to lie in state in her own chamber, with its furniture and hangings of blue damask. In all these various places and surroundings, however diverse, we note the same observant eyes, the same lips, so resolute and seductive, and ever and always, in this woman cast into circumstances so eminently calculated to bewilder and lead astray, we note the inner powers that guide her soul, the unvarying effort to remain the being whom Louis XIV was wont to denominate his "Solidity."

Her very birth would seem to have destined her to a condition of incongruity, the antithesis of any even balance. She was born of parents whose ages differed by some five-and-twenty years: he, the son of a Huguenot—and what a Huguenot!—she, a fervent Catholic. Differences of religion were not confined, at that period, solely to the field of dogma. They implied war and struggle to the very death. You illustrate the frenzy of these religious conflicts by a very striking anecdote, when you evoke the figure of Jehan d'Aubigné (Agrippa's father, and consequently the great-grandfather of Françoise), as he rides past Amboise. Drawing his boy's attention to the corpses of his friends swinging above the town gate, and laying his hand on the eight-year-old child's head, he says, "My child, thy head must not be spared after my own! If thou so sparest it, my curse will be upon thee!" Here we have one of the traditions Françoise was to find, so to speak, in her cradle. Hardly had she time to absorb it into her being ere her Catholic kinsfolk set all their energies to work to fill her with a different faith. Very justly, to my thinking, you discern, in this dualism, the most essential trait of a nature that gathered and summed up in itself the conflict from which France had been suffering ever since the middle of the Sixteenth Century. A perusal of your remarks on the education of Madame de Maintenon, and, later, on the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, leaves a striking impression of the extraordinary analogy between the uneasiness of the woman's conscience, and the uneasiness evident at the same period in the conscience of the nation, on the reader's mind. The Seventeenth Century, the age of order, had carried, hidden in its bosom (as its inheritance from the Sixteenth Century, torn by civil and religious strife), the germ of anarchy. All its labours, instinctive or deliberate, in political and in religious matters, were directed to the reduction of these germs to order. This appetite for complete unity within the State explains the Revocation. It is a remarkable fact that this Revocation should have coincided with the most homogeneous effort made by the Gallican Church. The Revocation dates from 1685, and the Declaration of the Clergy of France, so severely condemned by Popes Innocent XI and Alexander VIII, was issued in 1682.

May we not believe that one of these demonstrations was intended to render the other more acceptable? Should not the desire to afford the Church a proof of his own orthodoxy at the very moment when his Bishops were sending forth their most vigorous assertion of their independence of Rome, be reckoned one of the motives which led Lous XIV to tear up the act of reconciliation put forth by Henri Quatre? This is a possibility, as is, also—and Michelet supported the theory—the view that the King's course of action might be accepted as an atonement for his adulteries. One of the merits of your book is that you have discerned, beneath these secondary causes, the most deeply seated of them all—the need, obscure and irresistible as Nature's own call, for the binding up of every vital force within the country into one perfect harmony, and the country's resolve that France should be welded into one complete and invulnerable whole. This clear-sightedness of yours has enabled you to set the Protestant convert, the King's confidante at this most critical epoch, in her rightful place in history. You depict her for us, silent, making no offer to advise, her great desire, the supreme object of her life, to see the reformers returned to the fold, and reabsorbed into the Catholic communion, but trembling and terrified at the prospect of these wholesale conversions. Was it not she who wrote the words, "As to those who are converted through fear, what a terrifying state is theirs!" How striking are the pages in the course of which you describe her to us, in the Chapel at Versailles, praying, in her little gilded gallery, for those same Huguenots whose return to the Church—brought back, like herself, out of heresy into the truth—she so ardently desired to see, but sorely perplexed, nevertheless, as to the means employed, though not daring to oppose them. By experience she knows the sincerity of the Protestant belief. She asks herself whether those strong measures, the result of which she does approve, are certain to produce this same result? She is not sure of it. She remembers how she had written, as a child, to her aunt at Mursay, from the Convent in which her other aunt had shut her up, "Ah! Madame and my Aunt! You may imagine the hell that this house—so-called the House of God—is to me, and the ill-treatment and harshness of those who have been made the gaolers of my body—but not of my soul, for that they cannot reach!" The words, you say, are worthy of Jeanne d'Arc, and you go on to wonder what share she who penned them can possibly have had in the campaign of the Dragonnades. Your answer is a positive "None!" and I believe it to be correct.

I believe it all the more, because the plan for the creation of Saint-Cyr seems really to have dated from this period. Now this would denote a tendency in the mind of the creatrix of the famous house which is the absolute opposite of the "compel them to come in" counselled by Blâville and put into practice by Louvois. Madame de Maintenon was a woman of sixty when she began, according to the judicious formula you employ, "to devote herself to another work of reform, that of diffusing, among a small people, her own subjects (her three hundred and fifty daughters at Noisy), the knowledge she herself had acquired in the course of so many experiences and vicissitudes." For these, her subjects, Saint-Cyr was in process of construction. All that was best, all that was most deeply hidden in the heart of this exceptional woman, is comprised in the words on which I have laid stress. Life had taught her to withdraw into herself, with painful and triumphant effort, and *adapt* herself to circumstances. The youthful Huguenot must have begun by shutting up her own convictions in her heart and must have *adapted* herself, afterwards, to her Catholic and conventual existence. The needy girl must have curbed her own sentimental longings and *adapted* herself to the somewhat dubious surroundings gathered about him by the witty buffoon who had saved her from destitution. The handsome young widow, still far from well-provided, must have found it necessary to practise thrift and *adapt* herself to the requirements of the social circles ready to extend her their hospitality. She must have *adapted* herself, too, to the side-scenes of the Court, when she made her appearance at Versailles in charge of the royal bastards. To climb higher yet, and compass the most unhoped-for of marriages, what profound insight into character she must have reached! The daily discipline of so many years must have developed in her a very unusual taste—the taste for superintendence. She longs to teach young girls, of noble birth like her own, and, like her, devoid of fortune, and with no certain future before them, the art, her own, of ruling and developing themselves on lines to suit the necessities of the France of their day. She will shape them after her own type, and having so shaped them, will establish them in life. You show us, with the lifelike touch that animates the whole of your book, what this work of superintendence was to her life—its real romance. I do not say you teach us to love her. But, when we close your book, we cannot but regard her as a woman endowed with a very rare and noble moral quality.

Was this innate nobility tarnished by intrigue? Her enemies—and she had implacable enemies—have asserted this to be the case. But after reading this book of yours, we realize the true value of such testimony as Saint-Simon's. And, indeed, can the Memoirs of that famous Duke, prodigiously brilliant though they are, be counted worthy of the smallest credence on any particular point? Magnificent specimens of style they are, and there it ends. I will say more. Where are the memoirs that reveal in any reliable fashion anything beyond the personal feeling of their writer? Even as, to thoroughly comprehend the character of a certain poet or novelist, we must clearly discern the general lines of their work, so, if we are to arrive at a fair judgment of an historical personage, we must give the go-by to certain testimonies, to such and such an incident, and concentrate our observation on the general tendency of the man's actions. This power of adaptability, which was Madame de Maintenon's strongest characteristic, presupposes an exact and minute analysis of every opportunity. That cannot be reached without a touch of stratagem, and a world of diplomacy. When, for instance, she agreed to accept the post of Governess to the King's children, she certainly did not say to herself, "I will marry him!" But every time her office brought her into touch with the King, the idea of securing some advantage, of strengthening her own position, was certainly present to her. She practised that science of approach the manifold dexterity of which is so wonderfully described by Virgil when he makes his Dido, imploring her sister to appeal to Æneas, exclaim—

Sola viri molle aditus et tempora noras.

This knowledge of the easiest methods of approaching a man, of his most favourable moments, may argue—when the man in question is a Louis XIV—a subtlety that savours of intrigue, but such a word, applied to a subtlety which is less the fruit of calculation than of a temporary necessity, would be too severe.

Grant me that Madame de Maintenon was ambitious in certain stages of her career, and I will grant you that in all her ambitions she remained upright, austere, faithful and true. These are the words in which you sum up your own impression of an existence so full of trouble that it would seem never to have attained real serenity. Even those mortal remains which, as you tell us, were torn from her coffin and cast into a dismal hole, were to lie there for a lengthened period before they found their final resting-place in that Chapel of Saint-Cyr where she had so often knelt in prayer. This book of yours gives her the monument that the great lady she was, so perfect in her moral attitude, would perhaps have valued above any other, a biography which will force the most hostile of her critics to respect her.

Believe me, Madame and my Friend,

Your respectful and devoted,

PAUL BOURGET.

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CHAPTER I

ORIGIN—THE CHILDHOOD OF MADAME DE MAINTENON

It was in prison, in a wretched room in the Conciergerie of the Palace at Niort, that "Françoise d'Aubigné, daughter of Messire Constant d'Aubigné and de Surimeau and Dame Jeanne de Cardilhac, husband and wife," came into the world, on November 28th, 1635.

It had been in a prison, too, in the Château Trompette at Bordeaux, and by order of the Duc d'Épernon, Governor of the prison, that the ceremony which had united that same Constant d'Aubigné, son of the great Agrippa, and Jeanne de Cardilhac had been performed, some eight years previously. A strange marriage! The new husband was forty-five, the young wife seventeen: she was an ardent Catholic, and daughter of a Catholic, Pierre de Cardilhac, lieutenant of the Duc d'Épernon, Governor of the Castle: the captive was espousing his gaoler's child! We may conclude the celebration of the marriage to have been as indispensable for the young lady's reputation as it was unwelcome to her family, and even to the Governor of the prison. And, indeed, the only document touching the ceremony that exists is a letter from Constant d'Aubigné to his close and obliging friend Monsieur de la Pereyre, which runs as follows: "Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon sent yesterday for Monsieur de Cardilhac and his children, ordered that the marriage should take place between that day and Sunday next, and that done, forbade either father or son to see my mistress or myself." The departure of the young couple was much desired, no doubt, and the Duc d'Épernon granted the prisoner his release. But the bridegroom found himself quite unable to pay the debts contracted during his incarceration, and was forced to remain where he was. So the honeymoon was spent within those dreary walls, under the hostile eyes of a family wounded alike in its pride and its religious feeling, and so obstinate in its displeasure that it refused to find the sum of money (326 *livres*), which would have sufficed, at that moment, to secure the prisoner's freedom from debt.

Yet Constant, on his side, had a father, Agrippa d'Aubigné, who had made a great figure at Geneva, in his house called Le Crest. With this father, a widower who had married again, had dwelt his stepmother, a charming and gentle-hearted woman. He had two sisters, one of whom, the Marquise de Villette, a good Christian and a good Huguenot, reigned over the family lands at Mursay, close to Niort. But none of these came to the young couple's help. Religious hatred and bitterness blocked the natural current of human tenderness and indulgence. This scion of a Huguenot stock had married a Catholic, and sprung the surprise upon his people. On either side the angry relatives closed their houses and their hearts, and turned their backs on the deserters. So it came about that, with the full knowledge of his kinsfolk, Constant d'Aubigné, that gallant, that fascinating charmer, who had been seen at Court wearing roses on his shoes, dressed *à la trotte qui mode*, with rose-coloured stockings, and the most varied selection of capes, lace-trimmed in double rows, playing delightfully on the viola, a cunning politician, a most versatile agent, now in high favour, now under suspicion, between the Louvre and those unmanageable Huguenots of whom his father was the exiled chief and, so to speak, the prophet, lay languishing in the prisons of His Majesty King Louis XIII, all for the lack of 326 *livres*.

Let us turn our thoughts back to that period of the religious wars, when certain men of powerful individuality, possessed by an unalterable conviction, a mystic passion, an immeasurable pride, became, at one and the same time, leaders of religion and leaders in war. Bitter as the struggle was between the men of dogma and argument, more than one partisan of this doctrine or of that would lose all count of theology, and join one or other of the two camps, according as circumstances led him. Agrippa, the father, said, "Some are converted by their passions, some by pensions!" and well he knew "those fishers in muddy waters, who seek things other than a conscience at peace, in civil or religious warfare." Agrippa had been the very soul of the Huguenot party: he was the incarnation of the Protestant, of what he himself called the "republican" spirit. His son, on the contrary, belonged to those bands of careless rovers who would pass from one camp to the other, adepts of each cause, or renegades, in turn, as it best suited them. If we seek any solid link whereto we may attach the frail life just opening within the prison walls at Niort, we need not fix our eyes on Constant d'Aubigné, the unworthy father: he was no more than an accidental variation from the race; Agrippa, the grandfather, leaves the real mark on his progeny. He left elements of strength, of intelligence, of critical ability, behind him, all of which we discover in the person of his granddaughter, the moralist.

A terrible bandit was this puritan Huguenot! He himself relates that, perceiving himself, at the age of twenty-two, to be on the brink of dissolution, he confessed his past sins to his friends, and saw their very hair stand up upon their heads. That confession must have been a stiff performance: but when Agrippa's final hour really did approach, and his last will and testament was written, he accused himself of one fault only: that he had broken the law of continence, and after four years of widowhood had "sought the company of Jacqueline Chayer," who "not without great persuasion," had borne him a son. He had called this son Nathan, so that "the name of David's accuser might continually recall his sin to his eyes and to his ears." Bred up on the Bible, he was like some Hebrew leader. He had heard the terrified shrieks of women and children when Huguenot torches carried destruction into the cottage homes of France. It was the "ire of Heaven" that lit those torches: and he himself but the avenging weapon of the Most High. The only repentance known to him was repentance for the sin of his flesh. That same rigid conception of life in its moral aspect, that scorn of the senses, was in Madame de Maintenon's very blood: she was to retain it for ever. All through her life she carried with her an aversion to the sins of the flesh, and that in the midst of a society where, in spite of all the thunderbolts launched from the pulpit, the most devout persons imputed everything to themselves as sin, save this one fault.

Agrippa's mother, Damoiselle Cathérine de Lestang, Lady of the Lande-Guinemer, died in giving him birth. She was a Catholic. She had been married in 1550, "according to the rites of our Holy Mother the Church, Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman," to Jehan d'Aubigné. Among the relics she bequeathed to her son, he found and kept a copy of Saint Basil in Greek, on the margins of which the young wife had left her queries and remarks. Jehan d'Aubigné, his father, influenced thereto by d'Albret, must have passed into the Huguenot camp soon after his marriage. He was an ardent supporter of the cause. He took his little son Agrippa in hand, resolved to make him an adept of "the religion," ready to face battle with the sword as well as the fray of theological argument. He brought him up with a strong, healthy body, fed him with an "exquisite nourishment," and forthwith, as soon as he was old enough to learn, set him to reason things out and talk them over. At six years of age, Agrippa tells us, the boy, ruled by a severe tutor, could read in four languages, French, Latin, Hebrew, and Greek. Hebrew meant his entry upon the study of the original Scripture texts. Under the eye of this tutor, whose brother had died for "the religion," the child spelt his way, verse by verse, through the Psalms. It was no astonishment to him, as he bent over the rectangular characters that spoke to him of another world, to learn that certain chosen races receive direct inspiration from the Lord. When the Bible was laid aside, the student was to make acquaintance with Plutarch's heroes. That accomplished, he translated the *Criton*, to his own delight. And then the proud father promised he would have his boy's work printed, and place the youthful author's portrait on the frontispiece of the book. To temper the child's soul to endure the persecutions he was warned he must expect, his eyes were constantly called to look on that which might suggest them. And not only was he taught to venerate ashes grown cold in urns now centuries old, but genuine corpses too, still dangling from their gibbets. One day, after the Amboise conspiracy and its merciless suppression, the father, riding past the little Touraine city, bade his child look up, and pointed to the bodies of their friends swinging from the gateway. Sitting erect upon his horse, " They have beheaded France ! " he cried : and when the boy " spurred up close to his father, having noted the unusual emotion his face betrayed," Jehan d'Aubigné laid his hand on his son's head, and said, " My child, thy head must not be spared after mine : if thou so sparest it, my curse will be upon thee ! " It was a strong object-lesson, a fierce and bloody baptism. The boy was eight and a half years old.

When Jehan d'Aubigné thus passed with his little son beneath the gibbet at Amboise, he was on his way to Paris, there to place the child under the care of the learned Béroald, " a very great personage at the University of Paris." And once more the Bible and Plutarch were explored. The little fighting men of the morrow must be nourished on the marrow of lions. Condé, the Calvinist leader, took up arms. Then Béroald fled from Paris with his wife, his children, and his four pupils, who formed part of his family. His coach was stopped at the village of Courance, they were all cast into prison, and while the Inquisitor questioned Béroald, the captains amused themselves with the pretty schoolboy in the white satin doublet with silver embroideries. " The whole gang is sentenced to death ! " they tell him. But in come the fiddlers, and the persecutors, noting his childish grace, propose that he should dance a gaillarde with them. Dancing or dying, all's one to the little hero. A brave gentleman who had been a monk came and kissed the boy's cheek, exclaiming, " I'll save you all if I die for it, for love of that child ! " At Montargis the little band was harboured by the good Duchess of Ferrara, who kept young d'Aubigné sitting beside her on a hassock for three whole days, so that she might enjoy his youthful discourse on the beauty of death.

Such was his childhood, fed on " exquisite food," and ruled by a conception of religion that glorified bravery and pride of spirit. For that religion he must know how to die, and how to deal death to others, likewise, without a trace of fear. Churches were places of refuge, within whose walls armed warriors might rest them from their strife, and wash off the blood that covered them by steeping themselves in the waters of the Scriptures.

When Brunetière, one of the best masters of our modern literature, was preparing his treatise on the work of French writers, he overlooked, amongst those of the seventeenth century, the name of Agrippa d'Aubigné. On being asked his reason, he replied, " I did not know where to place him ! " Agrippa, belongs, indeed, to no special class. Taking him all together, he is really a writer only in the sense in which that may be asserted of the authors of the Bible. In his case, energies of the most contradictory description all act together. His vital ardour pours itself forth in hatred as much as in love, in ferocity and in tender grace, in fiendish sarcasm and in youthful tenderness. His Protestant rationalism does not prevent his petulant imagination from revelling in thoughts of magic—he sees phantoms and devils in the darkness of the night. His fierce love of war does not weaken his humanistic leanings, nor does it fetter his poetic flights. " The most attractive of my pieces," he says, " came from my hand when I was sitting on my horse, or in the trenches, and my delight was not only in the diversion, but also in feeding my mind on meats that were out of season." Life, to him, was a splendid festival, such as heroes might see in their dreams, dedicated to the God of Armies, of War, of Love. The charming Diane de Talcy stole his heart away. At once he fell into a frantic fever. Fain would he have died : and lo ! this fever, instead of bringing him to his grave, pours itself out in two thousand lines of the tenderest and most poetic love—his " Spring-time," he calls them. And truly they seem to make us hear the rustling of the rising sap, the growling of the floods of spring.

War and fair ladies, first of all, then politics. He carries his spirit of criticism into the councils of his master, Henry of Béarn. To lecture, to negotiate, is a delight to him. Henry is twenty-two, Agrippa twenty. We are just at the moment of the Protestant leader's marriage with Marguerite de Valois. Catherine de Médicis has bound her adversary down with threads of silk and gold. Henry, the King's brother-in-law, lives in the Louvre, much less of an anxiety amidst the merry-makings, the tourneys, the well-watched amenities of the family life within those walls than when he rides at the head of his partisans in Navarre and in Guyenne. Agrippa is there too, wrathfully eyeing this process of domestication, and fanning the flame of fidelity in his master's heart. But he conceals his anger, and together master and servant lend themselves, with smiling faces, to the life at Court. Agrippa plays the gallant in a velvet doublet and peaked shoes. The swords are laid away. Agrippa, the cunning, goes so far as to ape the convert and mumble paternosters. But never for one instant are his Huguenot ardour and his suspicions lulled to sleep. He keeps his eye upon his master, for Henry the charmer is always exposed to the danger of falling under some charm himself. Distrustful, clear-sighted, Agrippa was always to remain a zealous but a troublesome servant, swift to sharp criticism, watchful, ever ready with his blade, whether of sword or tongue, and pursuing his master with his " blunt fidelity." The words hail thick and stinging from his lips, like bullets from a musket : " You have only tears in your eyes, they have arms in their hands ! " " They are on horseback, you are on your knees ! " " You are a varlet here, instead of being master yonder ! " Agrippa's picture might be painted with two swords in his grasp—the steel with which he riddles " Loyolle's brood," jeering the while at its contortions in the death-struggle, and the other a sword of fire, the flaming herald of that fury he was prone to dub the " kindled ire of God, the chastisement of Heaven." In strict logic, the development of his life is to be simply the development of his own nature. He loathes the Louvre, but he delights in the little Court of Guyenne, so rough and soldierlike, more of the camp than of the court, whose denizens take pride in its rustic purity, its simplicity, its robust habits, its endurance. But when Henry summons his wife, Marguerite de Valois, to his side, Agrippa is like the devout men of old who smelt sulphur the moment the devil drew near them. Into that little Court Marguerite brings vice as surely as heat brings out snakes; and when Henry, instead of making himself ready for slaughter, here or there, begins to court fair ladies, scoldings, anger, quarrels on his puritan comrade's part are the invariable result. When Henri III departs this life, Agrippa feels a shrewd suspicion that his prince, always a tepid Huguenot, will shortly come to terms with the Catholic communion. And when Henri, now King of France, and converted to the national faith, kisses the Altar of Notre-Dame, the action stings d'Aubigné like a treason to himself. He is stricken as a friend, a Calvinist, a partisan, a republican. He will express his feelings even as the Catholics did on their side, when, beside the coffin containing the remains of Henri III, they saw the claimant, Henri of Béarn, half-seated already on the throne of France, and "clapping down their hats, clenching their fists, clasping each other by the hand, they murmured this final conclusion: better die a thousand deaths!"

Scornfully he withdraws himself, not into the leisured peace of his patrimonial possessions, but to a fortress conquered in bygone days, and still his by right of conquest, the little stronghold of Meillezais, in his native Poitou. There he dwells, a warrior under arms, watches from his ramparts, strengthens his fortifications. He has hung up his sword, but he is itching to take it down again. When the King of France offers to come to an agreement with the Protestants of La Rochelle, Agrippa gives his opinion before the Council of the town. He counsels acceptance, but this tractable appearance is only a piece of bitter irony, for he adds a request that his own gibbet may be set up at the entrance to the meeting-place of the Assembly! Then the more reasonable men, the lukewarm members, rise up against him: the Lord of Meillezais becomes the trouble-maker, the obstructionist, of the Huguenot party. He takes a savage pleasure in his solitary position, dubs himself a "scapegoat," dwelling in his remote desert, writes his *Tragiques*, his *Histoire de France.*

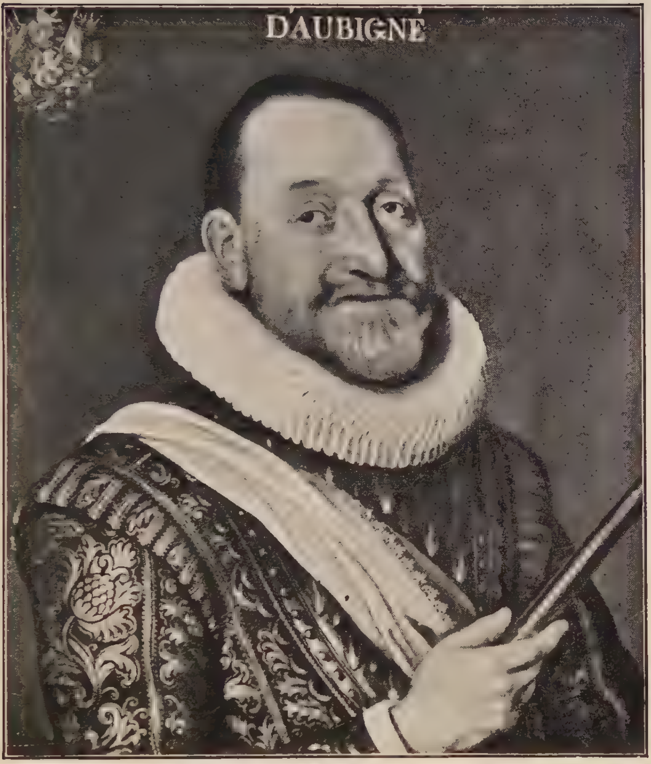
Fancying himself not sufficiently remote from the outer world, he withdraws further yet, behind Meillezais, to the Isle of Doignon, parted from Poitou by a series of canals. From his terrace he looks out over the sea, he can signal to the passing English craft that land him supplies of arms and ammunition as they go by: and as he needs must live and feed his little garrison, and as the ungrateful Henri cuts his pension down, he pays himself in kind. From the top of his keep he sends out messengers to levy toll upon the boats coming down the Antise, the Sèvre, the Vendée rivers. Stubborn still, fault-finding and censorious as ever, he feeds his pride on the sense of his own genuine superiority, his splendid powers.

Then falls his supreme defeat, that which comes from within, which we bring upon ourselves. He is a married man, for on a day when he was fleeing from France, in one of his fits of fury, to take service with the Duke of Bavaria, he had seen the face of Suzanne de Lezay at her window, and Love, like a thunderbolt, had fallen upon him. Four times over, so he tells us, he had been sentenced to death "for his honour and delight," and all the better for that he loved the joys of life, of warfare, and of love. He was a good husband, and a watchful father. He, too, had fed his son on the "exquisite food;" during his leisured life at Meillezais he had given him an education more suited to a great lord than to the poorly provided son of a nobly born gentleman, the education he had himself received, literary, religious, military. But in this other case, nature was weak. Constant, his son, had no taste for storms. The Court politicians knew that well enough. They showed him glimpses of sunny corners lit by the royal favour, and Constant, sublimely indifferent as to the question of transubstantiation, let himself be won over. With cynical simplicity, he apprised his father of the fact. "Father, I pray you affectionately, if you should chance to hear that my business has led me to go to Mass, never to believe your son would dream of espousing so damnable and impious a religion, foolish and brutal into the bargain: take me rather to be a perfect atheist!"

What this indolent son loved was the elegancies of life, balls, ballets. His father's mind would turn to him when, in his rages, he shot forth sarcasms against discourse on such subjects as chromatics, the colours known as turquoise, withered leaf, *minime*, *triste-amie*, and so forth: when he would descant on the toadies who strutted up and down outside some great lord's door, rolling a toothpick in their mouths, to make men think they had been dining with him. Constant, head over ears in debt always, and living under the threat of finding himself cast out of the King's antechamber into the King's prisons, shrank from no job that promised money, not even from joining himself to the pursuers of the "goat of the desert." And, indeed, the townsmen of La Rochelle themselves were entreating the Court to "make an end of the troublesome fellow," and "pull his fortifications down about his ears." Thus it came about that Constant, one fine day, put away his doublets, his lutes and violas, and betook himself, in secret treaty with the Court, into Poitou, there to lay hands upon Agrippa's stronghold. He set about buying over the Meillezais garrison, and boasted to the Court that every man belonging to it was on his side and against his father. Meillezais itself he described as a resort of gamblers, a house of ill fame, a coiners' den, where he himself would shortly be installed as master. And then the father, who has faced four capital sentences without bowing his head, is struck to the heart by his child's treachery, and capitulates. But the method of his capitulation is to sell Meillezais and Doignon, with all his arms and ammunition and supplies, to his co-religionist the Duc de Rohan. And this semi-capitulation is a business transaction into the bargain, for never has the "goat of the desert" forgotten his own interest. The Duc de Rohan pays him 100,000 crowns for his two fortresses, and the condemned man, on whom watch was kept but carelessly, we may well guess, departs out of his country, with the money safe in his saddle-bags. It has been his dream to make the resting-place of his old age, his final refuge, in Geneva. Not as an exile, but as a fugitive, he enters the Republic, holding his head high; his tone as uncompromising as of yore, he pours out anathemas on his country and on his master too. On that Calvinistic soil, the Council offers him a hearty welcome: Agrippa feels himself at home: his pride, his love of command are gratified when he sees the Syndic come to wait on him in his lodging, and himself entertained at a banquet at which the great marchpanes are stamped with his own arms, and seated, at divine service, in the place allotted to " the first of last year," facing Calvin's own pulpit. In right masterful fashion he takes possession of this commanding position, and at once anxiety begins to stir. The fact is that the " goat of the desert " gives trouble everywhere, even in the desert. This " republican " is an autocrat at heart. Nowhere does he assimilate himself : one " does not know where to put him." He disheartens and irritates the Genevans, just as he disheartened and irritated the men of La Rochelle, the Béarnais' supporters, and even the Béarnais himself. With all this, his heart is ever open to the pure delights of family existence, and he has begged he may have his daughter's child, the little four-year-old Arthémise, confided to his charge, so that he may bring her up with loving care. Behind the drawbridges of his dwelling, he cultivates his vineyard, and plays the patriarch. He pours out his heart in paternal letters to his daughter Marie (the Marquise de Villette), his " sweet," his "matchless one," and this daughter will bear her tender-hearted and stubborn-minded father's teaching in mind when, at a later date, she carries off the baby Françoise, just come into the world in the prison room at Niort, to rear her with her own children. Madame de Maintenon, in her turn, will kidnap the grand-daughter of that same Marquise, and bring her up a Catholic with her own " daughters " at Saint-Cyr. This love for his two wives, his daughters and his grandchildren, is the one oasis in the old Huguenot's heart where the " goat of the desert " may find a pool to slake his thirst. Listening to the prattle of that little four-year-old maiden, he finds it such a delight that it comes back to him even while he writes his will, and because of some saying—what it was we know not—dropped by those artless lips, he bequeaths the child a special legacy; yet even while he holds the tiny hand between his own he ponders the anathemas he will launch against the King of France, the Cardinal de Richelieu, and weaves his machinations with the English, the Germans, the Swiss of the Grisons. He fancies himself at Doignon still, watching the sea: never will he lay down his arms. Let us remember this trait when we note Madame de Maintenon's eagerness for the conversion of children belonging to Protestant families. In her mind, saturated as she is with tragic memories, religious unity and national unity are blended into one great whole. The civil war, which men have called a religious war, is always to remain the nightmare that haunts her heart—and her conscience too, it may be—when she remembers the blood that flows in her own veins. Never is she to lose sight of the days when, as Agrippa put it, "the towns of the Centre are frontier towns," when the "frontier towns" opened their gates to the foreigner, when the former friend of Henri Quatre sent his secret messages to London.

Constant is his messenger—for the unworthy son has craved pardon. And when, after having been present at the Council which has finally decided upon war, Constant returns to France, he pays nocturnal visits to Louis XIII and Marshal Schomberg, he betrays his father. But at Geneva, d'Aubigné, clear-sighted as of yore, reasoning closely, ready to pounce on any symptom of deceit, unmasks the traitor in his turn, and as an end to all these quarrels and reconciliations, we hear the final curse. As a volcano casts forth its lava, he casts off his son, bidding him go back "to the stench of his past life." And then once more he hangs up his battle blade, turns his back on active measures, takes up his sword of fire—in other words, his pen—and surrounded by the phalanx of Huguenots who close their ranks about him, fortifies the pride fed by the passionate sympathy of his immediate circle. His talks with his Genevan friends: Théodore Tronchin, Goulard, Diodati, Turettini, may be easily recognized in the bold jests of his *Confession de Sancy* and his *Baron de Foeneste.* We fancy we hear the shouts of laughter of the guests gathered round the evening blaze over the aged fugitive's riotous descriptions of the follies of the Court, the superstitions of the Catholics, the tiny flask within which the idolaters would capture, and proceed to worship, a sneeze from the Holy Ghost!

But death comes at last, and in that presence he rebels



Agrippa d'Aubigné

no more, but greets the Visitor as one sent by the God who had sent him life. He puts away his hatreds from him: "The moment has come," he says, "when the hand of peace must be stripped of its gauntlet, and offered to one's most repugnant foe." His wife, Renée Burlamachi, kneeling beside him, waters him with her faithful tears, and beseeches him to take some nourishment; he replies, "Let me depart in peace, sweetheart! I would fain eat the bread of Heaven!" Death itself has not dismayed him. To die is but the last upward soaring of the strong soul returning to the very source of energy. He departed on Ascension Day, May 9th, 1630.

We will look at his will.

To his son Constant, father of Madame de Maintenon, Agrippa leaves his curse. He proclaims him the "destroyer of the goods and honour of his house," and disinherits him "on account of divers huge offences and more particularly because he has been the accuser and slanderer of his own father." Notwithstanding this, if any undoubtedly legitimate child of his should make its appearance, "I leave to his children, not to himself, the property of the Landes-Guinemer, my only patrimony." He had already handed over his maternal inheritance, the castle and lands of Mursay, to his favourite child the Marquise de Villette, as her dowry.

As his moral legacy, he left the terrifying memory of the civil wars, that memory perpetuated in his *Histoire Universelle*, and in the melancholy laments of his *Tragiques*. He likewise leaves the trace, only partially effaced, of his secret alliance with the kingdom's foes: and added to that, the prestige of a splendid intelligence, and the authority of counsels inspired by simple puritan tastes, a clean and healthy sense of family relations, and a stern judgment of those temptations of the flesh which he himself had not wholly escaped.

We have lingered long in contemplation of this great figure, because Françoise d'Aubigné is to be the true grandchild of the stubborn Agrippa. She will carry into the opposite camp, with the leaven of her Reforming ancestor, that same tenacity in religious matters, that same concern for moral conduct, that same upright, lucid, practical spirit, and something, too, of the same pride, the conscious possession of a certain moral superiority. She will never unbend till, when she has reached the summit, she puts her supreme pride in hiding herself within the position she has attained, and growing modest in it. Though she reminds no other person of it, she will herself remember that her origin was Protestant, and at the bottom of her heart she will nurse a secret partiality for her former kindred. We shall find her letters full of sharp criticisms of the minutiæ, the routine, encumbering the ancient fabric of the Roman Church; we shall not find a single criticism of the Protestants. In her mind, they are brothers from whom she is parted, brothers whom she esteems. And in her indefatigable endeavour to obtain conversions, she will pursue the brothers from whom she has been parted even so far as to snatch them from their mothers' arms, and so bring them back into the century-old unity of the Kingdom and the Church.

Let us follow her now, step by step.

We have learnt what the child brought with her into life, deep hidden in the mystery of her being, even before her first breath was drawn. Round about her cradle, parents, friends, protectors, all hated one another. Each side showered anathemas upon the other. By her mother's special desire, Françoise was carried in the arms of Agrippa's daughter, the Marquise de Villette, to be baptized in the Catholic Church at Niort. Her godfather was François de la Rochefoucauld—hence her christian name, Françoise. Her godmother was her cousin Suzanne de Baudéan, a child, whose mother, Madame de Neuillant, a militant Catholic in favour at Court, stood behind her daughter, raised her hand in response to the baptismal queries, and swore the infant should be brought up in the faith of the ancient Church. Madame de Villette was promising herself, meanwhile, that she would bring up her niece at Mursay, to be the worthy grandchild of Agrippa d'Aubigné. Constant was not to keep his daughter with him in the prison. Thus from the very outset, war was declared between Madame de Villette and Madame de Neuillant over the baby's head. Her aunt carried her off, to begin with. Madame de Villette went and kissed the poor mother in her bed, took the child from her, carried it to her coach, and drove away with it to Mursay. As for the father, little cared he whether his daughter were in the hands of Catholics or Protestants. A thorough atheist, he had changed his religion time and again, according to the chops and changes of his frauds and conspiracies—and always "with an offertory." The mother, for her part, said never a word. Poor Jeanne de Cardilhac bowed her head, and felt her embittered youth fast fading from her. It was all she could do to follow her husband, wrangle with his creditors, contrive the struggling life the couple led in one prison or another. She bore two more children after Françoise, sons, both of them, who were forthwith put out, here or there. The birth of his daughter had indeed placed Constant in possession of the small property of Surimeau, according to the provisions of Agrippa's will. But the land had been immediately exchanged with his rapacious brother-in-law, Caumont d'Adde, for an annual payment of fifteen hundred francs—barely enough to pay off some paltry debts, obtain his liberty, run up fresh debts again, and go back to prison. If his daughter was to be as steady and careful as any nun, in later years, it was because the lesson of her youth had been a sharp one: Françoise was born into disgrace.

At Mursay, Madame de Villette began by giving her niece the nurse she had employed for her own younger daughter: having thus fulfilled her duty as an aunt, she set herself to discharge that incumbent on her as a Huguenot, and Agrippa's daughter. Françoise spelt out her letters in the verses of the old Family Bible; she learned, not without pride, that she came of a good old stock. She loved the sight of the Castle of Mursay, flanked by its eight turrets and the drawbridge behind which one seemed to live, as it were, in a kingdom of one's own. There she breathed the healthy air of Protestantism: she learned to hate feebleness and vice. To please her aunt, she must hate all untruthfulness like fire, she must fear neither heat nor cold nor fatigue, and if she did wrong she must submit to punishment. At an early age, too, she must despise all "catholic superstitions," such as they appeared in the eyes of the denizens of Mursay: a young lady, and more especially a young lady belonging to Mursay, was aware of the real value of the Mass, and of an *Agnus Dei* likewise, and the " stale stuff " of the relics, and the " forty arms of Saint Anthony " as well. Weapons to defeat the enemy's enterprises were being thrust into her hands.

Sometimes, when her father came out of prison, he would claim his daughter's presence. She would go to him. But the moment supplies gave out, the aunt at Mursay would proffer hospitality once more, and back to Mursay the girl would go, humbled to her very heart by the things she had witnessed. Jeanne de Cardilhac never asked to have her daughter: she was fighting the Caumont d'Adde relations, who would neither pay the annual pension, now, nor hand back Surimeau. The poor woman, with her two sons, went to Paris, to prosecute her suit. Nothing was left her now, save her eyes to weep with, and her pen, to write letters to the men of law. She lived, so she declared, on " the providence of God," and Providence was a niggard to her. She moved hither and thither, driven out of one lodging into another, sheltering now and again in some convent room: a bed for herself, another for her two boys. We find her, pushing her eternal lawsuit, established in the very courtyard of the Sainte-Chapelle, through which all the lawyers must needs pass, soured, quarrelsome, without a thought beyond the pettifoggery of the law-courts. Her unnatural relations endeavoured, it would appear, to use some uncertainty as to the validity of her marriage as a handle against her. Her nephew Sansas de Nesmond boasts, in a certain letter, that he keeps her down by threatening to have her children declared bastards. The unhappy creature held her peace, clung to the lawyers' skirts. Fever laid its hand upon her, she felt her strength failing, and beaten at last, thin, wan, driven to her bed, she gave all the signatures her opponents demanded, let them strip her as they would, hating every one of them with all her heart, and " seeing nothing but corruption on every side." " Whatever happens," the nephew writes, " I will so muddle the cards that the people we have to do with will never know how to begin the game, nor what it all means." So thoroughly did he muddle them that

Parliament pronounced a judgment that completed Madame d'Aubigné's ruin. The Caumont d'Adde family kept the lands and the money too.

While his wife was going to law and losing her case, Constant was being tossed out of one prison into another. Cardinal de Richelieu kept his piercing eye upon him, suspecting fresh plots, likely to bring the betrayer fresh friends and fresh dupes. Poor Jeanne de Cardilhac lived " on so little that it was incredible," owing money in every direction, to bakers and other people. One day, when she was with her husband in his prison, Madame de Villette brought the little girl there. Frightened by the hard face her mother turned upon her, the child began to cry. Long afterwards Madame de Maintenon was to say, " My mother never kissed me." Constant, on the contrary, was full of coaxings and caresses. One day he made his little daughter a present, a set of doll's furniture, made of pewter. The child went to play with the gaoler's daughter, who said to her, " I have a set of toy furniture too, but mine is made of silver." " Yours is made of silver," replied Madame de Villette's little niece, " but I am a girl of family, and you are not ! " Pride in her blood had been the child's chief food, during her dignified and frugal existence at Mursay. In Paris, meanwhile, Madame d'Aubigné, humbled and shorn of all her weapons, had betaken herself once more to the intermittent charity of the convents. When every other expedient had been exhausted, an honourable and virtuous lady offered her the shelter of a single room till the coming feast of Saint Michael. But after that ? . . .

Now before Saint Michael's Day arrived, Richelieu was dead, and Mazarin had opened indulgent arms to numerous prisoners of State. Constant was set at liberty. Then, drearily enough, the family gathered itself together, and Constant sent to Mursay for his " little innocent " : Françoise was seven years old. Her husband's return filled Jeanne de Cardilhac with a sense of repugnance. They lived on charity, to begin with. Françoise wept silent tears for her good aunt, her cousins—it may have been, too, for the turrets and the moats, for the life of a well-born little maiden which she had led at Mursay. Between her harsh mother and her little brothers, she played her part as a Huguenot bravely enough. She was taken to Mass on Sundays, and made it her childish glory to turn her back upon the altar, and endure, like a stoic, with dry eyes, the buffets her mother dealt her. " My horror of the Mass kills that I have of fire," Agrippa had written. The child had learnt her lesson at her aunt's knee. Her mother's blows were but a small thing compared with fire. The parishioners of Saint-Jacques-du-Haut-Pas noted with astonishment the presence of this little rebel in the midst of a family party so assiduous in its attendance at Mass. Françoise declared herself happy to suffer for her religion.

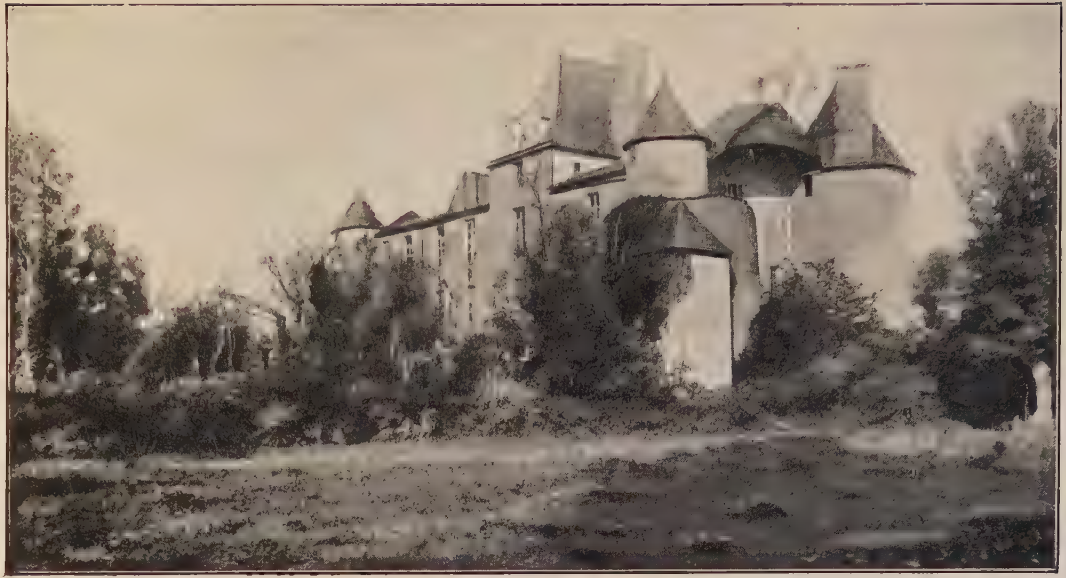
As live they must, and as they might find it better to drop out of sight and memory, the father came to a great decision. Through the Commissioners of the American Islands, he obtained his appointment to the Governorship of the isle of Marie-Galante; and the family packed its scanty belongings, took ship, and crossed the ocean. At all events they were turning their faces towards something as yet unknown, a hope, a renewal of their poverty-stricken lives. Once in the island they would reign a little, over black subjects, indeed, but to Constant the idea of any reign at all was pleasant.

The only document we possess touching this sojourn in the Antilles is a letter from Jeanne de Cardilhac to Madame de Villette. Jeanne's sole hope of some favourable turn of Fortune's wheel lay in her sons. She saw them growing languid and " as though they were wasting away, in the Islands," she wrote, " as much from the bad air as the bad food ; " she desired to " send them back to France, into some garrison." Meanwhile, under that American sky, and in a life which, though not perhaps extremely easy, was at all events sufficiently supplied, the mother was not neglecting matters : she had no desire to see her boys grow up planters and slave-owners, nor her girl become an indolent Creole. She made them read Plutarch, " forbidding them to talk of anything but what they read in that book ; " she took pains to teach her children the doctrines of the Catholic Church. And then the father, attractive, careless, as ever, would take his " little innocent" upon his knee, fondling her with that easy good-nature that drives the educator to despair, " I cannot bear to hear you told such fancies, my daughter ! " he would say. And the poor child, confused by all these " fancies," with black slaves about her everywhere, her heart sore with her mother's harshness and unkind treatment, knew one joy only —her own mother writes the words—to " hear folks talk of Mursay."

Then a fresh stroke fell : the family returned to France, presumably for the purpose of taking the sons to " some garrison," and Constant took it into his head to go and seek fortune with the Turks. He was quite prepared to turn Mussulman (" with an offertory "). For many years all trace of him was lost. But a lately discovered record of his death reveals the fact that he died at Orange, all alone, just as he was setting forth on his new adventure.

Fate, which had stripped Jeanne de Cardilhac of everything she owned, now robbed her of her children. She had been left without any means for their support. Death provided for one : her elder boy was drowned in a pond. Madame de Neuillant took the other, Charles, as lazy and as charming as his father, to be her page. Françoise, whom they called " Aubignette," now growing into a pretty girl, with chestnut hair, a slender figure, and eyes that seemed to have stolen the sunshine of the Isles, returned, without a shadow of regret, to her good aunt's home at Mursay, and the serious, temperate, well-to-do existence in which she delighted. The air she breathed in her aunt's house was her true native element. The memory, the worship, of Agrippa reigned at Mursay. There the shade of the great warrior ranked with those of the old Roman heroes. Silence was kept, no doubt, concerning certain memories of Meillezais and Doignon. But of an evening, sitting round the fire, while the young girls wound the hemp, many a page of the *Histoire Universelle* was read aloud. Some one would recite the throbbing lines in which the heart of the Béarnais' old comrade—a tender heart, though it was all too proud—poured out its grief when Ravaillac's dagger dealt its fatal thrust. In the dwellings of all friends of " the religion," the portcullises were dropped at night, and behind their closed doors the inhabitants cheered themselves with recollections of the heroic times. Everything connected with the memory of the Protestant leader, as it was treasured at Mursay, made its appeal to fortitude and virtue, to the worship of a healthy religion, to family affection, to the purity of antique literature: this was youth's golden page!

The page was swiftly turned. Madame de Neuillant's Catholic eye was fastened enviously on the young girl who sat, Bible in hand, behind that Protestant portcullis. Aubignette, a girl of noble blood, must not be filched away after this fashion. Madame de Neuillant made her way to the Queen-Mother herself, and denounced the thievery at Mursay. She obtained a written order empowering her to claim the child and take her to her own estate in Poitou. Françoise shed many tears. Here she found none of the proud traditions of Mursay. It was life in a noble house, indeed, but rural in its antique simplicity. Aubignette, with her cousin Suzanne, the future Maréchale de Navailles, was set to herd the turkeys. The two young girls, each armed with a switch, a little basket with their midday repast tucked under their arms, and masks on their faces, to save their fair complexions from the sun, watched their flock, and meanwhile committed to memory, not Plutarch, as in the bygone days, but the very indifferent quatrains of the poet Pibrac. Aubignette was also placed in charge of the key that opened the barn, and presided when the oats were given out. In her anxiety to make her a good Catholic, her aunt tried what the convent might do. But the new pupil proved herself so obstinate a Huguenot, so devoid of any softness or affection, save for the memory of her kind Aunt Madame de Villette, and ridiculed the nuns to such an extent, that they, weary of the pig-headed girl whom they were expected to feed out of charity into the bargain, invited Madame de Neuillant to take the young lady back, and the godmother, chary of spending, in spite of her full purse, and inconvenienced, further, by the presence of so unmanageable a godchild, resolved, so Mademoiselle tells us, "to get rid of her by hook or by crook, and sent her back to her mother."



[Photo: Baussay.

MURSAY CASTLE, CANTON DE NIORT, DEUX-SÈVRES

Jeanne de Cardilhac had eaten her very heart out. Hardly anything of the woman was left in her, she was scarcely a mother. A sour bigotry was the only feeling she retained. To her daughter she gave nothing but harsh treatment. And the child, tossed to and fro from aunt to parent, from one religious profession to another, set her belief there where her heart was: Mursay, " the religion," the memory of Agrippa, her love for her aunt, these were woven into one worship in her soul. Her mother, failing either to reduce her to obedience or to provide for her support, ended by sending her as an indigent pupil to the Ursuline Convent in the Faubourg Sainte-Anne. Back to the convent again! And this time the nuns, in concert with her stubborn-minded mother, showed the girl no kindness, only " harsh words, hard treatment and cruel dealings." Here is the letter the child contrived, in her distress, to send by some round-about channel to her aunt at Mursay:—

" MADAME AND MY AUNT,

" The memory of the singular kindness it has pleased you to pour out on poor little forsaken creatures leads me to stretch out my hands, beseeching you to use your credit and your pains to get me out of this place, where to live is worse to me than death. Ah! Madame and my Aunt! You cannot imagine the hell this house, so-called the house of God, is to me, nor the ill-treatment and harshness of those who have been made the keepers of my body, but not of my soul, for that they cannot reach! Rivette will tell you the full tale of my terrors and my sufferings, being, as I am, alone in this place, without any one in whom I may put my trust. Once more I beseech you, Madame and my Aunt, to take pity on your brother's daughter and your humble servant,

" FRANÇOISE."

" Those who have been made the keepers of my body, but not of my soul, for that they cannot reach!" The phrase is worthy of Jeanne d'Arc. This little Françoise, too, had been bred up to be a heroine. But the hour of her surrender was at hand. A certain Ursuline nun belonging to the Convent, more intelligent than her fellows, perceived that more was likely to be done with the little rebel by reasoning and persuasion than by perpetual scoldings. And one fine day Mademoiselle d'Aubigné, won over by this nun's insinuating kindness, proffered a request that she might be allowed to listen to a controversy between a Catholic Doctor and a Protestant pastor in the Convent parlour. Thus she would be in a position to judge for herself. Soon she was seen, a short-skirted pupil, Bible in hand, behind the parlour grating, following with her finger the texts over which the two theologians were in hot dispute. Thus had Agrippa argued with the Cardinal du Perron, in the presence of Henri Quatre, and so sorely had he pressed the Cardinal, so unflinching, so relentless had his assault been, that he had left his opponent speechless, sweating great drops, " enough of them to fill an eggshell." In the case of Françoise, the advocate of the Huguenot cause was less well chosen, doubtless, and less persuasive. The controversy lasted several days. The Huguenot friends of the family sent their arguments and counsels of resistance flying over the Convent wall: they adjured the girl to remember she was the great Agrippa's grandchild. In later years Madame de Maintenon was to tell the ladies of Saint-Cyr how she had noticed, in the course of the controversy, that the pastor was " garbling certain passages in the Bible." She yielded at last, but on condition—so near the matter lay to her heart—that she should not be obliged to believe her Aunt Madame de Villette to be in a sate of damnation.

The great corner was turned. The child had fought like any Roman, and her memories of the struggle and its anguish were to endue the faith she had finally embraced with elements of an extraordinary strength. Till that moment she had been no more than a Huguenot child, a brave little soldier, clinging faithfully to orders that were precious both to her pride and to her heart. When she ranged herself definitely under the Catholic banner, and thereby incurred the reproaches of the friends she was forsaking, she found it easy to persuade herself that faith is a precious conquest, dearly bought, for which we must be content not only to suffer ourselves, but make our loved ones suffer too. When she made it clear that at the age of fifteen the one great matter, in her eyes, the drama, the happiness, of her existence, depended on the religious belief she was to adopt, she opened the door whereby the young girl was to enter on her life. Henceforward we shall see her move steadily forward on her road, with her virtues and her faults, her severities, her silences, her visible and her hidden activities. Invariably she will pursue the same end, the conversion of the Protestants, the driving of them back into the ancient fold to which she has herself returned; and, further, she will strive with all her might to purify that fold and open its gates to a new and vivifying influence. A true Mother of the Church, whenever, amidst the manifold vexations and weariness of the Court, she feels herself called to perform some divine mission to King or country, her thoughts will fly back to the young girl who, having endured in her life, her very soul, all the anguish of the religious wars, had ended by falling on her knees in the chapel of Saint-Jacques. Faith is more to her than a conviction, it is the very spring of her existence.

Madame de Neuillant made great haste, after her niece's conversion, to show off her pretty godchild: she was the visible sign of her own victory. The Queen Mother was forthwith apprised that Mademoiselle d'Aubigné had laid down her arms in the Convent parlour. Madame de Neuillant received congratulations from the highest quarter. None knew better than Anne of Austria how to intimate satisfaction with that sad smile of hers. Françoise and her godmother departed to Paris. A lodging was hired: the lady proposed to introduce her godchild into society, and settle her in life. One such settlement lay ready to her hand—the convent. How many dowerless maidens had already exchanged their earthly aspirations for hopes of heaven within those walls, to the complete satisfaction of their families? But Aubignette would not hear of going into any convent, so a husband must be discovered for her. Yet who would marry a portionless girl, and one with all the humiliating memories of that childhood behind her?

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There dwelt in Paris, just at that time, a poverty-stricken man of letters, of a droll wit, a feeling heart, and an infirm body, who deadened his misery by presiding over a coterie of wits and makers of merry quips. He had that caustic form of humour which has been denominated "the hunchback's wit." Yet this man, this poet, this Scarron, was no hunchback, nor even, as has been so often said, a legless cripple. He was a poor, paralysed creature who spent his days in a jointed arm-chair, shut in beneath hinged panels. Enclosed after this fashion, he was like some huge beetle in its carapace. When night came, he was taken out of his box and put to bed. Nobody had ever seen more of him than his head, that always hung on one side, and his big prominent eyes that looked different ways. He provided amusement for his acquaintances, and subsisted on the scanty sums his poems brought him in, and small gifts bestowed by friendly hands. Much indulgence was shown to the somewhat risky flights of his poetic muse. Certain pious and extremely highborn ladies, grave dowagers whose virtue was not affrighted by the entertaining fancies of the witty, were assiduous in their attendance round his armchair. Now and then, in the midst of his peals of laughter, Scarron would cry out sharply from sheer pain, and the ladies about him were thus able, all at once, to enjoy the gay wit of the poet, and taste the pleasure of pitying, and even of loving, a little, a poor wretch who was as unfortunate as he was entertaining. Scarron lived in the Hôtel de Troyes, on the counterscarp of the Porte Saint-Michel, and Madame de Neuillant, who, when she did not stay with her brother, Monsieur Tiraqueau, occupied rooms in the same hotel, would look in, in a neighbourly way, after she had performed her religious duties, to enliven her mind with the cripple's talk, and likewise, very possibly, to follow up an idea that was lurking in the back of her mind. The poet would dispense his jokes, and in exchange his visitor would give him good advice: he would avow his poverty, his distress, his visitor would wish him a companion, a faithful heart whose daily task it would be to cheer him. And one fine day the company assembled in the poet's room beheld Jeanne de Cardilhac, introduced by Madame de Neuillant, enter, with

Aubignette close upon her heels. The young girl, in her gown that was so much too short, so evidently poor, so grave and serious and rigid in appearance, was greeted with a hearty stare, and she, with that quick sensitiveness that recognizes any lack of civility in a flash, felt the humiliation. Her only answer to the poet's civil speeches, and the encouragements of the kind-hearted among the ladies, was her tears.

Not often shall we see Françoise d'Aubigné shed tears. She never wept in the Church of Saint-Jacques, when she endured her mother's blows for the sake of "the religion," nor yet in the Ursuline Convent, under all the nuns' ill-treatment and cruel dealings. To bear suffering in the service of a cause is a fine thing. But to be poor and shabby, to be given a pitying stare, to catch, perhaps, a smile—these make the pinprick that will pierce the armour of the veriest hero!

Then came the Fronde and its attendant troubles—civil war, troops of foreign mercenaries, terror, famine, sudden changes of fortune. Families and friends could only meet at intervals, in the course of the conflagration, athwart the smoke, as it were. We find Jeanne de Cardilhac back again at Niort, her daughter with her, seeking shelter, nay, even sustenance. After all these vicissitudes, the mother lays down her arms, retires into obscurity. We fancy her hiding her ruin in the recesses of some convent, where sorrow is stilled at last, and death comes noiselessly. We shall not hear of her again. Mademoiselle d'Aubigné, after this final sojourn with her mother, was sent up to Paris. Dressed in a gown of coarse yellow serge, a little basket in which were a few hard-boiled eggs and some brown bread in her hand, she was put into the cheapest corner of the stage-coach. A friend named Villarmont, who had known her as a little girl, at Martinique, met her when the coach reached Paris, took her to see Scarron, and then to the convent of the Ursuline nuns.

From that time Aubignette "belonged to Madame de Neuillant." Jeanne de Cardilhac had made over her daughter to her rich relative, a favourite at Court, a notable lady who had just married her own daughter to the Duc de Navailles. For her niece she had planned one of those poor relations' establishments which the steady good sense of this world regards as very equitable arrangements. Scarron, the paralysed poet, was rarely delighted to perceive the presence of the charming and unhappy girl among the ladies clustered round his grey armchair.

CHAPTER II

THE SCARRON HOUSEHOLD

The poet Scarron—His antecedents—His infirmities—The marriage—Private life—Scarron's salon—Madame Scarron's well-born friends—Her social successes—The Court returns to Paris—The crippled husband dies.

MADAME DE MAINTENON, talking one day about her marriage to her daughters of Saint-Cyr, said, in her reserved, laconic way, " I preferred marrying him to going into a convent."

A cruel alternative ! Scarron, the very antithesis of love, or the veil ! Aubignette's recollections of convent life were of a somewhat disdainful order. Already she was the woman who was to write to the Marquise de Dangeau in so harsh a fashion, " That Sœur Calixte is an obstinate, weak creature, a real nun, in a word ! " And though Madame de Maintenon was, in later years, to found the House of Saint-Cyr, her object in doing so was to create an establishment that should not be a convent at all.

On the whole, therefore, it seemed better to the girl to remain in the world, troubled though life in it might be, than to swell the throng of silly-minded childish nuns already packed behind their convent gratings.

Her aunt was rich, but she was " well known for her stinginess." Already the short-lived glory of the conversion had slipped her memory. To her thinking, her daughter's marriage to the Duc de Navailles was a triumph of a very different complexion. Thanks to that marriage, Françoise had become cousin to a duchess, but, in spite of it, she was allowed " to go naked." Madame de Neuillant thought she did a very generous thing when she gave the poor girl leave to take shelter in her Paris lodging. She herself had her lands in Poitou to look after, her duchess daughter to visit, and the old lady spent her life driving hither and thither in her great coach with its six horses. She never was in Paris for long, and then sometimes with her brother Tiraqueau, and only occasionally at the Hôtel de Troyes. The refuge, for Françoise, was of the most precarious kind. The necessity for settling the unhappy child in life was pressing. When Madame de Neuillant was away, she was left under the care of certain elderly dames who, like her aunt, were Scarron's neighbours. Those who saw the girl, tall and handsome, with such speaking eyes, but so sad, so poorly dressed, both pitied and admired her. There was something striking about her proud yet poverty-stricken look; already a mystery hung about her: she was known to have been in America; her neighbours called her "the handsome Indian." Those were hard times: her far-sighted friends began to prepare Françoise; they did not, perhaps, actually speak Scarron's name, but they would sound the alarm about the girl's uncertain future, and then they would take her to see their common neighbour. Where Scarron was, friendship and merriment reigned supreme; around Françoise, pity alone held sway. The Mursay kinsfolk, offended by her conversion, made no sign, and Françoise, firm in the faith to which she had returned, made no appeal. Often she was seen in church—no turning of her back upon the altar now. There, on her knees, her beautiful head hidden in her hands, she meditated, and began to understand. Once back in those dreary rooms, poor little Cinderella pondered her two alternatives—Scarron, or the convent.

And Scarron she clearly felt it would be. There were reasons for that.

The date—it was in 1651—is eloquent. The blaze of civil war has crept everywhere, by this time—into Poitou, into Gascony, the distant provinces to which Françoise belongs. Paris has already undergone one siege, and is shortly to undergo another. Round the infant King, the great nobles have taken possession of the stage, and quarrelled over it: not one has proved himself a disinterested leader, and so Mazarin, a foreigner, has imposed his rule upon the country. Against this foreigner the nobles have declared war. Wherever they may be, in prison, safe in their own outlying properties, or in their fortresses, they have one dream of glory, "to pull everything to pieces"—Richelieu has used the words already—and they succeed in doing it. Bands of foreign mercenaries are encamped on the open spaces before the churches—Spaniards, whose yellow faces and languishing glances amuse the populace, and Germans, plundering brutes, who terrify it.

Madame de Neuillant could advance cogent arguments in favour of her plea that Françoise must needs choose either Scarron or the convent. She was herself sufficiently connected with the great people of the Court to be most honestly convinced that in the disorder amidst which the masters of the world were floundering, at that time, there could be no hope of safety, for so forsaken a child, save in one or other of these two refuges.

In all this turmoil of the Fronde, Scarron was not without a modest glory of his own: and at that moment, when all the greatest in the land served the Regent, or fought against her, according as she gave fortresses, or refused them, the sickly writer, too, would change his patrons according as pensions were bestowed on him or not. One fine day he had himself carried, grey armchair and all, into "the kind Queen's" presence. Majestic and gentle, she seemed to him, in her long black veil. Scarron's conquest was swiftly made: "You shall be my patient!" said the Queen to him. Gallantly he decked his muse with the colours of his exalted patroness, concocted wise epistles, lectured the rebels. But the goblin spirit in him soon broke loose. The Queen's pensioned patient became the song-writer of the Fronde. One day, at the Bourbon mineral springs, the Prince de Condé came upon poor Scarron stretched out full length beside the bath, waiting his turn to be lifted into it, and entertaining the bathers, meanwhile, with his witty triolets. Forthwith the Prince secured his services to swell the buffoon chorus of the Mazarinades. To jingle rhymes, invent tormenting jests, buzz like a mosquito round the Cardinal's head, get a laugh out of the most disorderly proceeding, and earn a pittance by so doing, these were his delights, and in this business he excelled. While the princes were leading the dance of war, Scarron led the burlesque antics in the rear. Little lampoons at one *sol* each, born in a night, fluttered next day in their thousands on the Pont au Change. The Cardinal did indeed suppress the sick man's pension from the Queen, but thanks to his generous patrons, the poetaster of the war enjoyed several others in its place.

He was repaid, likewise, with illustrious friendships and flattering visits. His room in the Hôtel de Troyes became a sort of alcove of politics. Hither Paul de Gondi, that unforeseen pupil of Vincent de Paul, came to seek relaxation from the enforced gravity of his coadjutorial existence. He would find Scarron, flanked by his spaniel, his monkey, his parrot, and his magpie, polishing his verses. Gondi would sit himself down on the little bed, and produce anecdotes galore, and many a grain of salt to season the coming Mazarinade. Condé's friends would scratch upon the door, and lady visitors too—the little Comtesse de Fiesque, and the Comtesse de Frontenac. It was a merry cabal, but the decencies were observed. The ladies, before they hid their mocking lips beneath their velvet masks, would pass into the ex-canon's oratory: one would promise her gown of silver cloth embellished with purple flowers for the altar, another, that floating veil of hers, dotted with golden poppies.

Thus when that very mean and very eminent lady Madame de Neuillant set about cooking up this strange alliance between her godchild and the neighbour in the adjoining room, Paul Scarron was something of a fashionable poet. He had patrons, he had pensions. For a penniless girl, a marriage with the invalid, though not an advantageous settlement, was yet a settlement of a kind. Françoise d'Aubigné was then seventeen years and a half old: Scarron was forty-two. How many young girls, before this one, had married greybeards to ensure themselves a home, or escape the convent? The times were hard: a love-marriage, in those days, was a rare and risky adventure—Jeanne de Cardilhac's own was a dramatic case in point. And Madame de Neuillant was able, without any conscientious scruple, to state the terms of the dilemma

—Scarron, or the convent. Scarron himself behaved with delicacy: made no attempt to force himself upon the girl; even made a discreet offer, if she finally decided to go into a convent, to pay the necessary dowry. There was no time for hesitation. Scarron spelt freedom and security, at all events. The poet, through his aristocratic friends, caused his neighbours to be informed that the beauty and charm of the young lady who had appeared in his reception room had made a great impression on him. Françoise considered with herself. Supposing her aunt took it into her head to betake herself in her coach to her home in Poitou, or to Navailles in Languedoc, would not she, Françoise, be left forsaken in this town, shuddering amidst the noise and terrors of war? The cripple was tolerably well born, and if the matchmakers had given themselves the trouble of looking into his antecedents, and so finding out what prospect of a suitable marriage he could offer, here is what they would have discovered.

His grandfather had been a Councillor of the Parliament of Paris, and his father, Paul, an oddity, according to Tallemant, was extremely devout, uncompromising as to moral behaviour, a good Catholic, who quoted Saint Paul morning, noon, and night, and was nicknamed "the apostle." A very satisfactory parentage.

The "apostle" purchased a place—a Councillorship in the Chambre des Comptes—and instantly revealed himself the possessor of a captious temper. On the occasion of the funeral obsequies of Henri Quatre, he disputed the Bishops' right to pass, in the procession, immediately behind the litter on which the waxen effigy of the late monarch was carried. The prelates won. But it became necessary, after the ceremony, to arrest the "apostle," because he had hurried their lordships so unmercifully along the route. Later, when Richelieu founded the Academy, the "apostle" protested in parliament against the "Enquiry into the Statutes." There the grumbling fellow was an arrogant speaker, but at home he beat a hurried retreat before the torrential eloquence of his second wife, described by her stepson, who loathed her, as a stingy vixen who even "had the opening in her sugarbasin made smaller." While the "apostle" was thwarting the Cardinal at the Palace, young Scarron was entertaining himself, at his stepmother's expense, by playing the game in which the Fronde was ultimately to indulge. She had her revenge, for as she held the purse (in which the father took no interest), she refused to buy the insolent youth a place. Wherefore Scarron was driven to don the cassock, or rather the abbé's *petit collet*.

In the cheery little town of Le Mans he spent a period divided between facile devotions and the pleasures of the tavern and the *salon*. After some months of prudent conduct, he obtained a canonry to which a prebend was attached. This meant that his material existence was ensured. Whereupon the young Canon was to be seen, carefully attired, a trifle stout, comfortably furred in his ermine tippet, and constant in his attendance in his stall in the Chapter of Saint-Julien. At night, in the provincial ladies' *salons*, he would unbend, play the satiric rhymer, and banter the youthful members of the male sex present, like any abbé of the fashionable world. In the neighbouring country houses, where his ready wit won him many patrons, he bantered not at all, and if he did venture on an ode, a most flattering dedication was attached to it. He reaped a liberal reward in the procession of fat capons, vegetable marrows, and juicy melons, to whose excellence he bore such laudatory testimony. But when, at last, the strolling players took up their temporary quarters in that region, no consideration for his cloth sufficed to restrain him. Frolicsome young Scarron, in love with the stage and the ladies who trod it, tumbled out of one love-affair into another, and made up, in those sly little charmers' company, for the enforced abstinence his canonical dignity had imposed upon him.

What was the real nature of his illness? Let us not inquire too closely! Rather will we record the legend, so appropriate, apparently, to his case. One day, we are told, on the occasion of one of those masquerades in which he so greatly delighted, "he had rolled himself, having first covered the whole of his body with honey, in a feather bed, and then, being otherwise stark naked, had proceeded to exhibit himself at the fair. While he was taking his way home, most discreetly, to his lodging, certain mischievous wags set upon him, and stripped the feathers off the strange bird: which, escaping from their hands, came to a bridge, climbed on the parapet, and fell over into a bed of wet reeds. An icy chill passed into his veins, and filled his blood with the principle of the ills that overwhelmed him from that day forward."

This is the version given us by La Baumelle. The story-teller, we know, was apt, in his narrations, to carry fancy to the point of impudence. Let us beware of his inventions. But let us accept the tale as a mythological fable. It will suffice, at all events, to explain the melancholy transformation whereby a daring butterfly was changed into a crawling grub.

Once the illness declared itself, fever began to waste him. He behaved with courage, continued to follow his calling, and show a cheerful face. Hidden in Paris, in a retired lodging in the Rue de la Tissanderie, he killed the hours by writing verses, and turning over the leaves of medical books. From medical subjects he went on to astrology, and then to necromancy. He was more disposed to solicit his recovery from demons than from good angels.

Here then we have the history of the man who was to be Françoise d'Aubigné's husband. How much did she know of his past? Probably just what the noble dames her patronesses chose to tell her. After so unhappy a childhood Françoise nursed no dreams of a lover. To take care of a sick man, to possess a room of her own, to make herself pleasant to distinguished guests, to help an invalid to lead a decent life, and die a worthy death, this was, even so, an acceptable task, and one which promised security. She undertook it.

The cripple's marriage may have been solemnized in the former Canon's own oratory. In the days when the parochial registers still existed at the Hôtel de Ville, Madame de Maintenon's biographers failed to discover any trace of the contract. The only testimony concerning it was the dubious assertion in a note drawn up by Clérambault, the genealogist. When Scarron presented himself to be married, the parish priest inquired: "Are you capable of performing your marital duties?" To which query Scarron replied, "That is Madame's affair, and mine."

But on a certain day, Monsieur de Boislisle discovered, in a notary's draft-box, the procuration given by Jeanne de Cardilhac, the vanished mother, to her old friend Gabart de Villarmont. He also found the marriage contract, drawn up on the afternoon of April 14th "in the year one thousand six hundred and fifty-two," in the house of Madame de Neuillant's brother, Tiraqueau de Saint-Hermand. Mademoiselle d'Aubigné brought her right to her paternal inheritance into the settlement, and Scarron brought his lawsuits with his sisters and step-sisters, the "apostle's" heirs. For Scarron, nobody signed. Monsieur Tiraqueau and his brother Monsieur de Candé signed for Françoise. There was no procession of signatures, at the foot of the document, to prove that troops of friends had passed the pen from one hand to another, and so marked their approbation of the deed. "One would almost have called it a secret marriage," says M. de Boislisle. Yet within four or five days Françoise was signing her new name of Scarron. It was no secret marriage. Rather was it a somewhat humiliating acceptance of a poor bargain performed with tightened lips, behind closed doors.

The young bride hid herself in Scarron's lodging. They were an anxious couple, very poor. This was in April 1652: the eve of the worst days of the Fronde. In Paris, enthusiasm had died down: even the power to laugh had departed. Mazarinades could not make famine easier to bear. Expectation, uncertainty, were on every side. Scarron felt the wind of the Fronde was on the turn, knew the breeze of the King's party was beginning to blow. He began to dread the consequences of his own satires. Gladly would he have wiped out the memory of his monkey tricks, and cast his indecorous Mazarinades into the well of forgetfulness. It may be that the influence of his grave young wife was affecting him already. He forsook his humorous triolets, and had a "serious piece" played at the Marais Theatre, "*Don Japhet d'Arménie.*" Its success was secured by Ménage and Segrais. At night, when the performance was over, flattering reports would reach the young couple's ears. A swarm of small and enthusiastic literary fry came in attendance on Scarron's friends, who trooped to congratulate the paralyzed playwright, crowding his gloomy staircase. A sort of effervescence of popularity bubbled around the fashionable buffoon: the public—the *canaille*, as the great folk called it—doted upon its Scarron: he was its dwarf, its jester, who scattered wit and drollery into dramas that drew tears from every eye.

But he, the poet himself, like many a professional entertainer, was full of anxiety and melancholy, at heart. His patrons of the Fronde had led him far, and the masquerading days were over, now: civil war was showing its dreadful face at every door.

Let my readers imagine what that tragic week in July 1652—only three months after their wedding day—must have been to the young couple, to the discredited poet. On July 2nd, very early in the morning, Madame Scarron heard Mademoiselle riding by, at the head of her *Chevau lègers*. The middle-class folk, the humbler people, shut their doors and hid themselves. The Princes, the great lords, were all fighting and quarrelling: the frenzied beating of their wings darkened the unhappy nation's sky. Behind them, there were foreigners on every side. The Catholicon of Spain was paying the expenses of the war, and Fuensaldagne, the bigot, a rosary at his belt, was waiting behind the Marne, to pounce on his advantage. Mademoiselle, with her blue feather, and her bunch of straw—the emblem of sedition—pinned to her breast, was launching the thunder of her guns against the King her cousin's troops. Shouts came up from the street, dead men were borne past on litters, others passed on horseback, bowed down in their saddles, mortally stricken, their feet still in the stirrups. Amongst the wounded Scarron heard the names of several of his friends: the Duc de la Rochefoucauld had received a lance-thrust which had pierced both his eyes. The King's troops were forcing the gates of the city, hunting Condé's men. The town was filling with threatening hordes of foreign soldiery, encamped on every open space.

Amid all these turbulent doings the young King reached his fourteenth year. On October 20, 1652, he returned, with his mother, with the Cardinal, a King regnant, of age to take the reins of government. Instantly, on the good-hearted and religious population, as on the tottering provinces, the young sovereign exercised his mystic power. The nation had desired him so greatly, had waited so long for his coming, had watched over him so jealously, all through the troublous times. When his dawn appeared, the spirits of darkness all fled away. The Court took up its autumn quarters in the Louvre, and had scarce ears enough to hearken to all the prayers for forgiveness that were addressed to it. Mademoiselle was packed off in disgrace. Tossing her crest, she betook herself to Saint-Fargeau, and there carried on her matrimonial strategy, improving her pleasure grounds, the while. Monsieur, extremely docile and repentant, retired to Limours. Paris, rid of the German and Spanish bands, began to breathe and eat once more. Mazarin himself, though suspected, because he was the Regent's favourite, did not loom half so dangerous now he was back as the King's servant, supple and cunning, pouring forth benedictions on the nation he had always "loved so dearly."

Scarron, we may well believe, was one of the first to try to make his peace: but, unimportant though he was, the poor histrion's life had been so linked with that of the great men of the earth that the season of their repentance became the season of his starvation. He had ceased to supply the street hawkers with flying sheets. It was only too natural that the poor wretch, nailed to his chair as though it were his coffin, should do his utmost to lie low. His young wife, we may be sure, was not sorry to mark this period of wisdom and quiet living. Her assiduous attendance brightened his dreary hours. With her husband she studied Italian, Spanish, and Latin. The cripple's stiff fingers refused to write: she acted as his secretary. Scarron, at that moment, was seeking his subjects in the works of the Spanish playwrights, brought into fashion by the two last Queens of France. He liked their truculent realism, their outspoken, familiar, amusing dialogue. Learning in this school, Madame Scarron grew less stiff, her school-girl pen lost its provincial heaviness. Now and again, when her husband dropped some coarse or indecorous expression in the course of his dictation, she would hesitate : but in the end she would take the fence, and finally contracted a taste for straightforward speaking and limpid expression. At bottom, her nature shrank from indelicacy, and even from pleasantry, but she drew what best suited her own temperament from this realism : that which was cynical realism in his case, became an accurate and familiar simplicity in hers. She will never shrink from detail; Scarron will always be trivial, and all the pomp of Versailles will never kill Madame de Maintenon's taste for the familiar. Their task once finished, the husband and wife realized the silence of the hotel courtyard that had rung, in the old days, with the shouting of lackeys and the rumbling of coach-wheels. Scarron was looking about him for new patrons. Nobody had taken his political convictions very seriously. In the Fronde, the poor fellow had played the part of a puppet, that sometimes deals blows, and sometimes receives them. But still his pension was not given back, and his anxious mind began to dwell on distant journeyings. A ship was just about to sail, laden with emigrants, for America : he planned to join the seekers after fortune. Françoise, perhaps, retained some recollection of the peaceful existence on the Isles. The couple sold the very little that remained of the " apostle's " possessions. With eighteen hundred *livres* in their purse, they set forth in a miserable coach, to travel by easy stages to Nantes. We see them reach Amboise. But the undertaking was too difficult for them : decidedly, for a poor paralyzed creature, one fate only was possible—he must stay helpless in his chair, and snap his fingers at misfortune, till his patrons came back to him. When they made their secret peace, he would make his. Madame Scarron had a cousin at Court, Madame de Navailles. They would not let themselves quite drop out of this favoured relation's recollection. So the Scarrons went back to Paris.

There they hired, on a three years' lease, part of a house in the Rue Neuve Saint-Louis, now No. 56 in the Rue de Turenne.

It was in the Marais, the quarter Scarron loved best of all, where the smart folk lived, close to the theatre, so that the cripple, of an evening, could hear the cheering echo of the audience dispersing slowly through the narrow streets, after sitting and stifling through the performance of *l'Écolier de Salamanque*.

Prudently, little by little, the Scarron's *salon* opened its doors once more. One by one, the fair rebels found their way back. The low doorway in the Rue Saint-Louis became highly respectable in the neighbours' eyes when they saw all the coaches stopping in front of it. The ladies of the Fronde, having made their peace with the Court, returned with grave personages in their train—the Maréchal d'Albret, the Duc de Richelieu. The cabal in the shadow, as it had been in Gondi's time, had disappeared: the circle enlarged its borders, annexed all the intimates of the Louvre. Its merriment, its wit, its perpetual invention of new sources of gaiety, attracted the very counsellors of the royal Palace. An amusing remark dropped in Scarron's room made a man's fortune: the place was a hotbed of news. Husbands in high places, noting Madame Scarron's serious grace, took courage, and brought their wives with them to her house. Françoise was charming, hospitable. Her grave and simple style of beauty gave no offence to any one. Her eyes shone with the melancholy fire they were to keep all her life long. In that atmosphere of merriment she seemed to have come from "another place;" the American legend surrounded her with a poetic touch of mystery; to her guests she was the beautiful Indian with noble French blood in her veins, a convert, a child who had been lost, and found again in the house of some literary Bohemian. She began to expand.

To preside over a *salon*, to entertain, by some happy chance, the favourites of birth to meet the favourites of the intellect, this, then, was Madame Scarron's somewhat audacious pride. One day saw the arrival in the Rue Saint-Louis of the most witty conversationalist in Paris, the fair Ninon, grown not one whit more steady in conduct, in spite of her forty years, but the pattern of elegance in manners and deportment, graver, when she chose, than any duchess of them all, and on subjects poetic or philosophical, unrivalled in debate. Nothing made Françoise wonder!

Speaking of this period of her life, Madame de Maintenon was to say, in later years, "I was a hundred miles above any feeling of self-interest, but I desired respect." And that she possessed. In that extremely prudent life of hers we note one paradox—her trust in chance. She liked to feel the eyes that rested on her were friendly, as she moved to and fro among her guests, tall and light of foot, in her flesh-coloured taffety gown, under a close-fitting flowered satin coat, and a kerchief trimmed with Genoese point. These garments figure in the inventory of the wearing-apparel that belonged to Scarron's widow. The assembled guests admired her fine carriage, her hair drawn back from a forehead full of intelligence, her quiet movements. When she bent over the poor cripple's chair, in the midst of that gathering of fine folks who set such store on gaiety and politeness of behaviour, her manner would grow very gentle: there was something about her at once independent, natural, and sad, and it heightened her beauty even while it set her apart. The company met in a large square apartment: a walnut-wood table of considerable size stood in the middle of the room; against the walls were a piece of English tapestry and a couple of bookcases; there was a couch, too, seated on the corner of which we may imagine Ninon, playing the philosopher, surrounded by Academicians, playing the coquette. One day Mignard visited the Scarrons. He admired the fair hostess; he asked leave to paint her picture; and on the wall of the reception room, facing the picture of Saint Paul, a relic of "the apostle," the portrait of Madame Scarron hung, in due time, in full dress, her shoulders and bosom bare, radiant with youth and beauty. Did Mignard take some tender pleasure in painting a portrait which should wipe out the memory of the years of shadow and suffering—the portrait of a great lady? One would think so. None of the Versailles portraits have the triumphant look of this one of Madame Scarron in her youth. When the room in which the guests met grew too crowded, or the conversation too broad, Françoise, without a sign of annoyance, would deftly select her own company. She would conduct the prudes, the dowagers, into her own chamber, she would take her seat on her great bed with its tall posts: there, in her chosen and feminine circle, a very different tone reigned, and while the amphitryon entertained the persons about his chair with what he was pleased to call "*des coyonneries*," his wife, sitting apart with her chief friends, Duchesses and Maréchales, would promptly and quite unaffectedly re-establish the propriety which was her natural habitat.

Will my readers believe it? Madeleine de Scudéry, the mystic geographer of love, frequented Scarron's house and delighted in it. Madame de Sevigné, in her weeds for her young husband, and Madame de Lafayette, too, passed through the *salon*, certainly the most mixed, as to company, in the whole of Paris, and the most amusing—like a tiny fair at which the poor invalid, seated in front of his booth, spoke his comic harangues and disarmed the rigour of the prudes. People were all the more at their ease there, because those who came could pay their way in kind. When the Maréchal d'Albret asked Scarron to entertain him, he sent fat capons, melons, Spanish fruits, beforehand. Then the poor fellow's mendicant splendour played its part as an element in the burlesque entertainment. The little street used to be scandalized by the smell of roasting meat and the sight of lackeys carrying fish and pasties to the *Hôtel de l'Impécuniosité*, in the very middle of Lent. On days of abstinence, we may suppose, ladies who were prudent stayed away. Those occasions were bad ones for Madame Scarron—the drinking songs grew decidedly coarse. She might be seen sitting at the far end of the table, "picking at a herring"—such was the memory that remained with one of her guests. Scarron, the inexhaustible, was trying, meanwhile, the effect of his *Roman Comique* upon his friends, and leading the burst of laughter, he exclaimed, "Good! All goes well! My book is sure to succeed, since it gets a laugh from clever fellows like you!"

A strange marriage, this! The husband a professional performer of intellectual pranks, the wife a very embodiment of gravity. What can they have talked about, those two, when, the play over and the coaches all rolled away, they were left, like the fabled Beauty and the Beast, alone and face to face? Scarron, no doubt, like many who make merriment their profession, would drop back into melancholy. Françoise seems to have been too upright to make any complaint, either then or at a later time. She fulfilled her bargain: Scarron gave what he had offered, and gave it with kindness—a position, albeit a sad one; she, in return, gave her presence and her conscientious care. The young wife had suffered so much from private disaster and public misery that a shelter was all she asked Fortune to bestow upon her. One of her letters gives us a good idea of the way in which, despite all the inclemency of her past life, she was beginning to expand. It is perhaps the only letter amongst all those Madame de Maintenon was to write which bears traces of a certain playfulness—a whiff, as it were, of pride and happiness. On August 26, 1660, Louis XIV and his young wife Marie-Thérèse made their triumphal entry into Paris. The guerdon of peace, so long the dream of Anne of Austria, so earnestly besought by that queenly heart, had been granted to her prayer. Her niece Marie-Thérèse, the daughter of her brother the King of Spain, was to be her daughter-in-law at last. Madame Scarron, with her friends, was placed on the d'Aumont balcony to see the procession pass. On another balcony, close by, she saw, as spectators like herself, the Queen Mother, the exiled Queen of England, the first Princess Palatine, Anne-Marie de Gonzague, and Cardinal Mazarin. Madame Scarron was dazzled. On her feet for ten or twelve hours, she can scarcely realize all the splendours she sees, the exclamations she overhears. "The household of M. le Cardinal Mazarin," she says, "was not the ugliest thing we saw!" She reckons up his seventy-two baggage mules, and registers the graduated effect they produced. "The first twenty-five had plain clothing, the next appeared in colours more brilliant than the most splendid tapestries, and the last had red velvet trappings embroidered in silver and gold, silver stirrups, and bells"—a crescendo worthy of an Italian opera. "This magnificence," the chronicler goes on, " astounded everybody. Nobody had expected the Minister would be bold enough to make such an exhibition of his riches to the populace." After the baggage came the household. " His four-and-twenty pages, all his gentlemen and officers, his twelve coaches, each with six horses, his guards, his four-and-twenty saddle-horses with magnificent trappings, and so splendid themselves that I, for one, could not take my eyes off them ! " But " nothing in the world was more beautiful than the King's own Household," proceeds the enthusiastic Madame Scarron. Her pen fails her, " for she will never," she declares, " be able to give an idea of the elegance of the horses ridden by the pages." Then came the Musketeers, with their hats feathered to match the colours of their banners. Madame Scarron is careful not to overlook her cousin Monsieur de Navailles, when he passes by, " magnificent," as he prances at the head of his *chevau-légers*, and it is her cousin the Duchess who presents the keys of Paris, on an embroidered velvet cushion, to the young Queen, in the King's name. In that cloud of golden dust, Madame Scarron draws her breath freely. This royal triumph delights her. Her letter, addressed to the mother of the Duc de Villarceaux, has all the sprightly freedom of a missive dashed off at random to a familiar friend : so dazzled has the writer been that her memory fails her a little. " After that . . . No ! I think the people of quality came after the *chevau-légers* ! . . ."

And amongst those numerous persons of quality her eyes seek out her own friends. Here they come, " shining in their coats all covered with solid gold or silver embroideries "—the Marquis de Beuvron at the head of all the nobles, with Monsieur de Saint-Luc—" and," she says, " Monsieur de Saint-Luc was looking for me, but not where I was." Monsieur de Villarceaux, whose horse was so spirited that he was within twenty paces of her before she recognized his " handsome dark head ; " the Chevalier de Grammont, her friends de Rouville, de Bellefonds, La Feuillade, " they all looked admirably well ; " but even so the imposing display moves her to a touch of irony : " If I had to give the prize to anybody," she says, "I would give it to the horse that carried the Seals!"

That day, Madame Scarron, like the populace, felt the magic influence of a young and stately sovereignty. The people gazed with delight on the youthful Queen passing, frail and serious, behind the great glass windows of her coach, her fair hair crowned with silver wheat-ears. It was peace she was bringing to the country, in that coronet of silver ears. Madame Scarron pictured with delight the swelling pride that must surely fill a young Queen's bosom on her triumphant wedding day, and with some boldness her pen sets down the words: "The Queen must have gone to her bed, last night, tolerably well pleased with the husband of her choice!"

Twenty-four years later, at Versailles, Madame de Maintenon, too, was to retire one night, well pleased with the husband she had chosen. But never, in her royal servitude, shall we find again that tone, that smile of hers, never again, in the most splendid of the Court processions, will those speaking eyes look round, with merry confident glance, for "the friends." And when she went back, that night, to Scarron, in his grey armchair, struggling to match the assonances of some greedy guttler's song, Madame Scarron, perhaps, went to her bed not over-pleased with the husband she had not chosen.

"The poor crippled fellow," she was to say in after life, "always had some dream in his head of an elixir of gold, or the philosopher's stone." As the royal fortunes rose, Scarron watched the smoke of his own paltry glory disappear. Round the young sovereigns, merry-makings, ballets, play-acting marked the opening measures of the dance of pleasure; the dance of love came quickly in its train; young lords and ladies cast themselves into its vortex, and their elders followed, not unwillingly. Scarron found his clever tricks had ceased to bring him coin. He sold the remnants of the "apostle's" plate, and was reduced to entertaining the few remaining spectators of his former comedies with pitiful merry-andrew's jests.

He complained that nowadays, when he sent a man a sonnet, all he gave him in return was to raise his cap. These fellows, with their sham generosity, would send him a few pistoles in exchange for the somewhat ill-tempered dedications the poet, now fallen quite out of fashion, would address to them. In his fury, he went so far as to dedicate his verses to his pet dog. His restless mind now turned to research of a pseudo-magic kind. He busied himself with the organization of a laboratory of chemistry, where spirits rising out of the smoke of his retorts were to come to the help of mortal man. The elixir of life, the philosopher's stone—experiment after experiment failed to find them, yet he always fancied the discovery just within his grasp. There was an element of intoxicating uncertainty about the search in which the unhappy man, condemned to live in solitude, would seem to have revelled. At the same time he was pursuing other and less unsubstantial dreams, industrial undertakings. To get well and grow rich—these two great longings never faded out of the heart of the sick guest of the *Hôtel de l'Impécuniosité.* On plans spread out all round about his chair, he would study the repairs of the bridges over the Boutonne and the Charente, and Madame Scarron had to write letters to Louvois at the poet's dictation, soliciting leave to undertake the carting and wharf-porterage connected with the work.

On one final occasion, Scarron felt himself once more in favour with the great ones of the earth. Queen Christina of Sweden, then engaged in visiting the curiosities of Paris, the infirmities of men and things, expressed a wish to see him. He fell in with all her wishes, had himself carried to wait on her. Each found favour in the other's eyes. The Queen had no objection to a witty monster: she herself delighted in puzzling flatterers with her own striking peculiarities, and showing forth, in her own person, the phenomenon of a royal genius which had cast every convention to the winds. Her intelligence and learning dazzled Scarron: she knew more than he did himself about the Spanish playwrights. When she dismissed him, she was pleased to emphasize the manner in which their lack of physical charm might draw the poet and herself closer to each other; she said to him, "I will give you leave to be in love with me: you were the Queen's patient, you shall be my Roland."

But poor Roland showed himself no more in the presence of the great, and they forgot him. His strength began to fail. Towards the end of the year 1660 he had himself conveyed, attended by his young wife, to the pretty village of Fontenay-aux-Roses, where his sister had a house. Only a few years ago, the pleasant-looking dwelling was still to be seen, set between its courtyard and its garden. Hither the sick man betook himself, to soothe his anxious mind in the peace of a country life, and bid farewell to his last hopes. Pinned on a wall, he found a *carte du Tendre*, and forthwith drew on the opposite wall a map of the Empire of the Jesters and the Republic of the Kill-joys. He was still dictating his *Roman Comique:* Madame Scarron held the pen, and that work done, would spend hours beside his chair, turning her spinning-wheel. Scarron would sit looking at her; he was grateful to the beautiful young woman for the faithful devotion with which she had adhered to the bargain of her loveless marriage with a wayward jester; he saw her smooth brow wrinkling over the uncertainty of her own future. "I know I shall die soon," he would say to his friend Segrais; "the only regret I shall feel is that I have nothing to leave my wife, who is extremely deserving, and whom I have every imaginable reason to praise."

It was in Paris, in his lodging in the Rue Saint-Louis, that he felt death close upon him: he had reached his fiftieth year. If Madame Scarron ever tasted the cup of popularity, she certainly drained its very dregs during those dying days.

While she kept her last watch beside the sick man's bed, she could hear the nasal cries of pedlars in the street below, offering rhymed announcements, grotesquely humorous, of the "burlesque patient's" approaching death, "the serious and perilous illness of Mossieu Scarron." She shut herself up, made no sign to anybody but the priest, and that through faithful friends. And so it came about that the parish priest of Saint-

Louis drew near, one evening, to the dying man's bedside, and helped him to make a good end—an end, as Tallemant puts it, which "saved appearances."

So vigilant, so discreet, had Madame Scarron been, that the poet, his last confession and communion duly made, passed away in her arms, and neither did the *Gazette de Loret* know it, nor were the young widow's ears assailed by the burst of laughter with which the public—which cannot abide any alteration in its *dramatis personæ*, and had been watching for the meeting between the buffoon and King Death—had proposed to greet the agonized struggle, the death-rattle, the last grimace, of the unhappy Scarron.

Madame Scarron was a widow. She had never been a wife. She was very much alone in the world. But she still had her friends.

CHAPTER III

WIDOWHOOD—THE PERIOD OF UNCERTAINTY

Widowhood—Poverty and ruin—The Convent of La Petite Charité—Friendships—The d'Albret family—The Richelieus—Madame de Sévigné—The Confessor—The Abbé Gobelin—Charges brought against Madame de Maintenon's character by the Princess Palatine and the Duc de Saint-Simon.

SCARRON died on October 7, 1660. Instantly creditors rose up in shoals. Money was owing in all directions: to shopkeepers, servants, relations, friends. The very Princes his protectors handed in their bills. Madame Scarron paid them all: the maidservant's account, 213 *livres*, 200 more to the kitchen wench, as much to the housemaid; the valet was content with the dead poet's wardrobe. Besides these, there were the heavier debts: 6000 francs to Potel, a friend, 2000 to Monsieur d'Elbène, 170 pistoles to the Maréchal d'Albret. The assets exceeded the debts by several thousand francs. The furniture was sold by public auction. We recognize all the decent, even elegant, furnishings of the poet's dwelling in the lists drawn up by the notary's clerks for the purposes of the sale. The fine picture called the Ecstasy of Saint Paul, which Poussin had painted expressly for Scarron, had already passed into the hands of Jabach, a collector, and may now be seen at the Louvre. Mignard's portrait of Madame Scarron had likewise disappeared. The plate had melted away in the course of the chemical experiments of the preceding months. Scarron's friend Segrais attended the sale with the intention of buying the cripple's chair, but found it had been disposed of already. Madame Scarron, punctual, orderly, refusing every offer of pity and assistance, must have thought, in her stripped lodging, of the days when Jeanne de Cardilhac, too, had been forced to sell everything she possessed to provide food and firing. By her marriage contract, Scarron had ensured his wife a sum of 23,000 *livres*. When she had paid all debts, and certain trifling law costs, the young widow found herself "free and clear, with four or five thousand francs" in her pocket. With a quiet conscience and a cool perception of her position, she wrote to her uncle, Monsieur de Villette: "To tell you the truth, the situation in which I am is so deplorable that I believe I shall spare you pain if I do not render you a very exact account of it. Here you see the pecuniary plight of a poor fellow who always had some crotchet in his head, and squandered all his ready money on his hopes of finding the philosopher's stone, or something as probable as that. I am not fated to be happy, but we devout folk call such trials the visits of the Lord, and lay all our woes, with great resignation, at the foot of the Cross."

Madame Scarron set herself to order her existence in the spirit with which these "visits of the Lord" inspired her. She retired to a very narrow lodging belonging to the Maréchale d'Aumont in the Convent of the Petite Charité de Notre-Dame, close to the Rue Saint-Louis, between the Place Royale and the convent of Saint Francis of Paula. The nuns, established in their house some five years previously, under the auspices of Anne of Austria, received unfortunates and sick women, and devoted two wings of the building to the use of "lady boarders."

This retirement into a convent did not imply that the young widow was about to withdraw herself entirely from the world, and when Madame Scarron came, under the Maréchale's patronage, to hide her poverty in a house of which Queen Anne was the foundress, she was justified in the hope that her existence would not be entirely overlooked by the Queen Mother. Communication between the convent and the outer world, even the Court, was continuous. Anne of Austria, a sick woman, already suffering from the cancer that was to destroy her, was fond of making frequent absences from the Palace, of finding her way behind convent gratings, and paying visits to the nuns. With her she would bring the young

Queen Marie-Thérèse, a pious melancholy creature like herself. Together the two Queens, with their respective ladies, would attend Mass in the Convent of Saint Francis, Vespers in the Carmelite monastery, Benediction in the house of the Carmelite nuns. As they passed from one religious house to another, they left alms behind them, in each, for the poor, and for the nuns and their lady inmates, the sunshine of their presence.

Thus when Madame Scarron entered the Charité de Notre-Dame, she did put herself in the way of the "visits of the Lord," but also into that of the greatest people in the land. Her highborn cousins the Duchesse de Navailles and the Maréchale d'Aumont would not have gone to look for Madame Scarron in a shabby suburb: but it seemed a very natural thing to them to tighten the bond between themselves and a voluntary recluse who had deliberately crowned her poverty with a conventual dignity. Poor she was, and in that state of poverty she was resolved her friends should see her. The nuns did not strike her as being so very silly, after all: within their walls she felt herself sheltered from the scorn of the outside world, and brought into communion with a life that sought after a fixed ideal.

Like a good kinswoman, the Maréchale d'Aumont began, so Segrais tells us, by sending the widow everything she was likely to need; but she mentioned her charity to so many persons that Françoise lost her patience. One day there was a scene, and Madame Scarron had all the wood her cousin had caused to be unloaded in the court-yard piled upon a barrow, and sent it back. She would have no more of this indiscriminate almsgiving. Her object was to break, in the most resolute fashion, with a dubious past, to receive her fair acquaintances with proud simplicity in her fireless room, to reopen friendly relations with her family—with the de Villettes. Madeleine de Scudéry, a friend whose fidelity and generosity never varied, had learnt the secret of the strange marriage, and let her readers into it, in most entertaining fashion, descanting, in her Clélie, on the story of the youthful *précieuse*, so witty and agreeable, who was a widow without ever having been a wife. And to ensure being understood, she added, "the meaning of this enigma will be sufficiently grasped when it is realized that Straton was her husband. She was of a gentle temper, and made it clear by her behaviour that if she had seen company it had been more out of courteous civility than any particular attachment, for after his death," that is, after the death of Straton, "she retired into a house of Vestals."

Could a more discreet method of breaking with an inconvenient past have been discovered than to say, or let others say, that the Vestal Virgin had voluntarily embraced the austere existence widowhood imposed?

Once reconciled to her aunt's family, Scarron's widow would simply be the former Mademoiselle d'Aubigné, worthy by birth, parentage, and intellectual gifts to move in the small but select circle of her own chosen friends, just on the border of the gay world. Soon after the close of the year 1660, and only a few weeks after Scarron's death, the Queen Mother was duly informed, through the Duchesse de Navailles and Julie d'Angennes, now the Duchesse de Montausier, that quite close by, in the Convent of the Petite Charité, there dwelt, in a poverty endured with stoic courage, a young, and virtuous, and extremely intelligent widow. Madame de Motteville, on her part, alarmed the pious Anne as to the danger of leaving so young and beautiful a woman in such pressing need. This argument proved decisive. Madame Scarron was allotted a pension of 2000 *livres* a year out of the Privy Purse.

A scanty pension it was: it just supplied her, and frugally at that, with daily bread and "decent garments." The monastic regulations of a large and prosperous convent did the rest. Madame Scarron's appearance contrasted by its deliberate simplicity with the elegant attire of her fashionable friends. Her gowns, says Mademoiselle d'Aumale, "were only made of *étamine du Lude*," a sort of serge very much used, in those days, by persons of small means. She never wore any but plain underlinen. She was neatly shod, and had very handsome skirts. On her 2000 *livres* she contrived to support herself on this footing, pay the nuns for her own keep and her maid's, and give the maid her wages: she never burnt any but wax candles, and in spite of all this, she often had money over at the end of the year. She used to declare she had never been happier in her life.

That impression is frequently produced by a period of existence of a uniform character succeeded by elevation to some giddy peak of fortune. Agrippa's grand-daughter would affirm, in her later days, that she had felt she looked better in her plain serge gown and her capacious apron than if she had been garbed in the " faded silks " she had seen on the back of many a woman of small means. It is quite possible that without conscious calculation, and simply under the impulse of a serious nature, which perceived the truth, was resolved to follow it, and accurately gauged the resources offered by life, on one hand, and that nature on the other, she was able to compose her part with taste, and adapt it to her personality. By avowing her poverty she proclaimed her freedom. Thus she could be gracious and helpful without fearing her devotion to her friends might seem coloured by any motive save that supplied by her own kindly disposition. The great personages who had seen and admired her in Scarron's house now sought to attract his young widow to their own. She went. She had a ready wit : she knew as much, in her convent room, about the Court, the great world and the lesser, as when she had lived in the Rue Saint-Louis. Both at the Hôtel d'Albret and the Hôtel Richelieu she had her *entrées* at every hour : she would arrive on foot, and when she pleased, would linger on, allow herself to be persuaded to stay for dinner and even sleep the night, if the talk lasted beyond the hour at which her convent gate was closed. Soon her delightful company grew indispensable : these worldlings enjoyed the presence, in their midst, of a solid intelligence ripened, as hers seemed, to so exceptional an extent. She was like nobody else, so grave, so gay, with her sober frank expressions, her entertaining common sense, her humour with its touch of mockery. She was not a wit, but she was witty. There was a something that was fresh about her. The corner of the *salon* where she sat always grew lively when the young widow, a trifle severe-looking, perhaps, with just a hint of the puritan about her, at all events, set the ball of conversation rolling with that talk of hers, which another widow, Madame de Sévigné, thought "delicious."

The Maréchale d'Albret, says Madame de Caylus, was a person of limited intelligence, and extremely devout; Madame de Richelieu possessed no beauty, and but little wit; but both these ladies, and their husbands, delighted in the wit of other people. Madeleine de Scudéry, their constant guest, kept this worship alive, and endued it with the somewhat superannuated form of which she was herself the priestess. In this circle, where elderly women predominated, the reign of Louis XIV opened as though the break caused by the Fronde had never been, and the houses of ladies who had been young and brilliant in the days of Louis XIII had never been forced to close their doors against the blast.

The Abbé Testu had been these ladies' literary counsellor. Monsieur de Coulanges made his merry songs to entertain the little circle. Madame de Coulanges made game, now tenderly, now bitterly, of other folks. Then, beside the elder dames, there was the battalion of the brides: Athénais de Mortemart, whose marriage to the Maréchal's cousin the Marquis de Montespan had just introduced her into the d'Albret family, and who had been appointed one of the Queen's ladies. The young wife's biting mocking wit amused the dowagers. Madame de Lafayette, another member of the circle, would arrive with Madame de Sévigné. There was the Comtesse de Chalais, too, with blue eyes that never left the political horizon. Those fashionable gatherings of the seventeenth century were the most lively things imaginable: they constituted a society before Society was absorbed into the Court. Almost the only available amusement at this period was that the wits provided as they sharpened their blades.

Not long after she had become an accepted guest, Madame Scarron was an influence. Scarron had taught her enough to enable her to wield her pen with a light hand, and produce a reasonable assortment of *bouts rimés* in the course of an evening. Silent as to her past existence, owning cousins whose kinship gave her a standing in society, she was always ready to bear her share in the lightly flitting talk that went so well with the merry hubbub of the card-tables. The Maréchale d'Albret was always delighted, when she was sitting of a morning at her writing-table, in her lace cap, polishing her billets, to see Madame Scarron—who had already been to mass and said her Office, and who, having no house to keep and no family to visit and look after, was free to devote her time to her friends—walk in upon her. She had seen the *Gazette*, she knew all the last news, and could talk about it: though she was no great reader, she was a close observer, and spoke her mind fearlessly. "The gentle and respectful manners of Madame Scarron," says Saint-Simon, who knew it by tradition, "were much appreciated." Already she was to some extent the woman who, after she had risen to the highest position at Versailles, was to stake her pride, as it were, on hiding herself in it, slipping behind the rows of Duchesses on days of formal ceremony, suppressing herself with an exquisite modesty. This deliberate renunciation on her part is not all virtue, it is a personal taste. She loves truth, and boldly professes herself what she is, a woman of good birth, poor, indeed, but who cares naught for the affectations of the social world. She declines any attempt at rivalry, and forthwith becomes a personage. She has her place in the secret councils of the wise, who retire into their cabinets to discuss important affairs. Her opinion carries weight. There is a flash of jealousy in the eyes of the future Princesse des Ursins, as yet no more than a pretty woman, much courted and admired, when she perceives that the Maréchal d'Albret and other prominent noblemen have secrets to confide to that widow, while she herself is "left among the giddy crowd, as though she were not capable of serious conversation!" There will be an amicable explanation, one of these days, between the Princess and the Mistress of Saint-Cyr on the subject of their youthful rivalry; and Madame de Maintenon, referring to her recollection of it, will declare that sometimes she could have wished "she had been considered less solid-minded," and so have been left to amuse herself, and not have been obliged to listen to all the courtiers' grumblings, and their plans. "I would rather," she was to say, "have been laughing with Mademoiselle de Pons and Mademoiselle de Martel!"

Let us not believe her too implicitly! She loved to feel she carried weight in the secret councils at which those serious matters were discussed: there she discovered her vocation. If she made difficulties at the time, if she asserted, at a later date, that she would have preferred to sit and laugh with the younger ladies, she did the one and the other out of sheer civility. Hardworking by nature, she desired to be useful, to be actively employed, just as other women desire to shine. Madame de Maintenon would tell her daughters at Saint-Cyr how, after having been the confidante and adviser of Mademoiselle de Pons, she had presided, as it were, over the young lady's marriage to the Marquis d'Heudicourt. "I remember," she said, "that when she was married I was so taken up with her that I entirely forgot myself, and allowed myself to be seen by the whole Court, which attended the wedding, as ugly, and as carelessly dressed, as any serving wench. I was promptly conducted to a chamber, and when I came back, neither Madame de Montespan nor anybody else recognized me, so different did I look from what I had been before: and all that was because I desired, according to my custom, to please my friends, and not to gain any advantage for myself." And once Mademoiselle de Pons is married, Madame Scarron conducts her to Heudicourt, though she feels rather out of sorts herself, "not from sitting up late and amusing myself, but because of the extreme anxiety I had been under as to the success of the whole business. And the Maréchale d'Albret writes, "For the last fortnight she has never thought of anything but her friend's marriage: she is well rewarded by the joy it has caused her!"

The fact is she loves the labour of life as others love its splendours. She has none of the indolence and ignorance of the ordinary great lady. She knows what it means to keep a house, and what it costs to do it. In her fine friends' mansions the money slips away noiselessly, swallowed up in the huge machine which is their dwelling. She likes to keep these expenses in hand. Françoise d'Aubigné, who had kept the key of the granary and given out the oats for Madame de Feuillant's horses, still bore the problem of expenditure *versus* income in her mind. It was one her taste inclined her to solve, and before she began the reformation of convents, she had brought order into country mansions.

During her summer sojourns with Madame de Montchevreuil, in fact, the rounds she made as her hostess' volunteer housekeeper were finished before other people were out of bed. "Six o'clock in the morning never found me in bed," she is to tell us, "whereas my friends never rose till noon." Bailiffs, gardeners, gamekeepers, the very lackeys, all know the early visitor, passing with her light step and unassuming ways, dropping a word, now and then, to some member of the tribe of humble servitors, patting a child's head, saying a word of counsel here, listening to a grievance there. She picks the caterpillars off the rose-trees with her own hands, and overlooks the clipping of the box borders that pattern the lawns. When she has seen to all things, and brought order everywhere, she goes back into the great house just as life begins to stir within its walls, free to devote herself to games and needlework, to turn her spinning-wheel, or bestow her counsels. The good aunt at Mursay is dead, and Madame Scarron has made it up with her cousins: to the new Madame de Villette she writes that she is sending her a box, and inside it "some lace to trim your white tabinet skirt: I have had your kerchief washed, and have kept the other back. Aprons of English point were never so much worn as at present, but I should like to see sleeve trimmings and cuffs of the same lace, for nothing is more becoming than to have everything to match. That would look well on your morning gown, and if you intend to wear it with your kerchief, you ought to have an apron and sleeve trimmings to match."

Here we have the letter of a cousin who is in a position to see the fashions, and does not scorn them. If she does not follow them herself, it is because it does not suit her so to do. She lives in the world, and her simplicity is her adornment there (her director, the Abbé Gobelin made no mistake about this). Thus her reason and her taste alike are satisfied: here we perceive the system of her existence. She is not in the habit of attending festive gatherings, yet when the Maréchale d'Albret goes to " see plays of which she did not understand one word," as Madame de Caylus spitefully remarks, she must always be accompanied by her young friend, who is familiar with the Greek and Roman heroes, and recognizes the Augustus of Suetonius in the actor wearing a great wig crowned by a hat with a double tier of red feathers, who really is so remarkably like some old nobleman about the Court.

Thus she is the peerless habitual guest who never gives umbrage to a soul, and only takes her seat at the hospitable board so as to make it more agreeable to her friends. This period of tranquil friendships, in the course of which she rose from the humble position of the *protégée* who, as Saint-Simon puts it, " does duty for the hitherto unknown convenience of bells," to that of friend and counsellor, always remained the pleasantest memory of her life. In her later days at Versailles she regretted it, she would say," as the duck regrets her puddle." The bonds then knitted were never broken. When the *protégée* became the protectress, the mysterious lady who is half a queen never rests till the high-born friends of her younger days are at Versailles too, filling great offices about the Court. Her fortunes take their rise in these friendships, in this coterie. A step or two carries the dweller in the Petite Charité to the Hôtel Richelieu, at the corner of the Place Royale and the Rue Saint-Louis. Once there she is in the very heart of fashionable life, delivered, now, from all the trials that once darkened the brows of ambitious lords and their coquettish ladies. Should she chance to be ailing, or even disinclined to leave her room, she has only to indite a note : Nanon, her woman, will deliver it, and her fair friends are at her bedside in a trice. The nuns thought the widow " saw a tremendous amount of company." The good ladies may even have made some difficulties as to the " tremendous " amount of company she saw. And one fine day Madame Scarron left their house, and removed herself to those very Ursulines in the Rue Saint-Jacques who still treasured a brilliant memory of her controversy with the Huguenot pastor. A member of the community, a certain

Sister Basile, was a friend of hers. The frequent visits to the Hôtel d'Albret and the Hôtel Richelieu in no way suffered from this change of residence. Madame Scarron's noble friends had fallen into the habit of looking on her as one of themselves: she had been born a woman of quality, and she allowed nobody to forget the fact.

It was with the Duchesse de Richelieu and the Maréchale d'Albret that Madame Scarron made her first appearance at Court. She was well pleased, we may be sure, when she reached the Palace of Saint-Germain in the Duchesse de Richelieu's coach, on the evening of a great banquet at which she had the honour, with three hundred other ladies, of sitting down to dinner with the King. We know her able to hold her own with the Duchesse de Montausier, with young Madame de Montespan, with Mademoiselle de Scudéry, at Julie d'Angennes' table. Now for the first time she finds herself in the royal circle. The Queen is present, La Vallière too; all the personages destined to play a part in her life's history are there, before her eyes: little does she dream it, as yet! It was a day of glory—the rejoicings for the conquest of the Franche-Comté. The King, in the full vigour of his youth, drew all eyes, with his splendid presence, his sovereign ease of manner, the calm majesty of his handsome face—a true king, the very incarnation of a conqueror.

And when, safely returned from Saint-Germain, the ladies find themselves back in the familiar room in the Hôtel d'Albret, they have plenty to talk about. The Queen had presided over the table at which the Princesses of the Blood were seated. It was remarked that her French was still very indifferent, and that her face, in spite of her rouge, looked wan and anæmic under her much too pale hair. She had indeed brought a Dauphin into the world, but since his birth she had lost four children in four years: the last—"the Moor," they called her—had been born all black and hairy, and had fortunately lived a few days only. Could there be a curse on the poor Spanish lady's progeny? The young Marquise de Montespan had a great deal to say. Being one of the Queen's ladies, she had her place in the royal coach and in the royal bed-chamber.

Every night she attended the ceremony of the Queen's *coucher*. The poor Queen would lie in her great state bed, waiting for the King, and her ladies must divert their mistress's thoughts in her hour of sad impatience. Right well they knew the devilish game that had been in course so long was growing more and more complicated every day. At Saint-Germain La Vallière had her seat at the King's supper-table; graceful enough, she looked, but evidently weak in health, her pallor showing even through her rouge. "She is ashamed of her glory, sometimes!" quoth Madame de Montespan. Already four little bastards have found their way into the world. Two are dead, two more have seen the light at Saint-Germain, in the very Palace. The day the last was born, the Queen herself passed through the room in which the so-called invalid was lying and enquired how she did. "Madame," said La Vallière in a very plaintive voice, "there have been too many lilies and tuberoses in my room!" Madame de Montespan bursts out laughing, the two Maréchales and Madeleine de Scudéry, are scandalized; and what says Madame Scarron? She listens. Madame de Montespan is in great spirits; she draws a picture of the mistress, now weakening and pining to hide herself away, now madly bold and seeming to defy the Queen herself. "If I were to have the misfortune," says Madame de Montespan, "to be the King's mistress, I would never have the insolence to enter the Queen's presence!" Madame de Motteville comes in quite late: she has been attending the melancholy *coucher* of the Queen Mother, eaten up with cancer. In the midst of all her own suffering the Queen frets about the King her son, about her daughter-in-law: often her confidante sees her lying with her head thrown back upon her pillows, her hands clasped on the sheets, which are drenched with perfume to kill the smell of her complaint: there she lies praying, in silence and in tears. . . .

Madame de Montespan and Madame Scarron would have been astonished indeed to know what planets were watching and waiting for them, and that their horoscopes were already cast! "If I were to have the misfortune of being the King's mistress!" said Madame de Montespan. Was that her dream already? It would be a misfortune, but then one cannot always escape misfortune! Madame Scarron never understood very well what passion meant. She was "above any feeling of self-interest," but honour was the thing she always craved. Her pride had received too bitter a hurt. At a later date that pride in her own good conduct was to stir a scruple in her. "Tell me," said she one day in private, to one of her daughters, "could anything be more opposed to the truth, to genuine virtue, than the pride in which I spent my youth? That is the sin of Lucifer. To be esteemed and honoured, that was my idol!" Even delivered from all that had caused that pride to suffer, she sought to indemnify it for past ills: to be well-conducted, a model widow, this was her dream. Her nature, as much as her will, beckoned her along that path.

She was strongly attracted, on the other hand, by a religious discipline which promised to complete the harmony of her position in her own eyes: on such a basis she might most safely erect the somewhat flimsy and complicated structure of her own existence. The memories of her childhood, her laborious "conversion" (so called in spite of her having been baptized a Catholic), her choice of a convent as the refuge of her widowhood, her friendships, her hopes, all incited her to an alliance with the Church. At that period, when shepherds everywhere were seeking to increase the numbers of their flocks, she was pre-eminently fitted to become a most perfect follower, if only she might be in the hands of a director skilled enough to enable him to transform her into an "instrument for good."

If she, on her side, felt tempted to pass yet further within the sanctuary, we may readily imagine the reception that was to greet her there. This wise and leisured widow, with one foot in her convent and the other in the great world, was endeared at once to the servants of the Church, whom the budding heresies and disorders that threatened the King's reign were filling with deep alarm. At the Port-Royal great names and the most elevated virtues had apparently caught the taint of the disease whereof angels had perished—seraphic pride. Madame Scarron could offer a perfectly healthy mind, she could talk fluently and well, she could write better still, she had a taste for business, and to cap it all, she possessed that rarest of gifts, the power of influencing others: wherever she went, her charm made itself felt; and this gift she was ready to employ in the service of the rule of order and good behaviour.

She looked about her for an ecclesiastic to whom she might confide the direction of her conscience. A most important matter, this. He must be acquainted with the great world, and yet not be of it: this meant that all monks, all Jesuits—whom she never loved—and all fashionable *abbés* were ruled out.

She addressed herself to the Abbé Gobelin, a former military officer, become a priest quite late in life, a most saintly man, extremely scrupulous, who looked at his penitents' consciences through a magnifying glass and weighed them by the carat. Madame de Coulanges already confessed her sins to him, at the Convent of the Filles Bleues. When women habitually frequent the same houses and live in a certain intimacy, the fact that they have the same director makes a fresh bond of confidence between them. "Madame Scarron dines with us every evening," Madame de Sévigné was to write, ere long. Thus the intimacy must have been great. But how differently the watchful director judged his two penitents! Madame de Coulanges, with her exuberant gaiety, so evidently suited to her century and her gay surroundings, astounded her austere confessor by her fanciful revelations of fashionable frailties. "Each one of this lady's sins is an epigram," the good priest would say. With Madame Scarron he felt more at home: in her case the will to accept his direction was more genuine, and since she claimed to have renounced the vanities of this world, he took her at her word. He did not invite her to confine her renunciation to the vanities of dress, he went further still. And in the gatherings which had been accustomed to admire Madame Scarron's wit and her good sense, a strange metamorphosis was presently observed. The bright-witted friend assumed the outward appearance of a tiresome bigot, sitting apart, with eyes fixed on her tapestry frame. She kept Lent in earnest, now. She writes to her cousin at Mursay, "I am very much exhausted by the Lenten observances, and very sorry I ever undertook them." This intellectual fast tried her more than that in which the bread at each collation was limited to a certain weight.

This second conversion accomplished, she was an obedient instrument in her confessor's hands. By those hands, and to the very end, the threads of her life were to be grasped. A most admirable instrument she was, thanks alike to her good sense and her intelligence, born to serve the ends of those whose hearts were filled with dread by the disturbed condition of religious thought in the highest sphere of intelligence, and the laxity of morals of which the young and all-powerful King was already setting so terrifying an example.

The Abbé Testu became aware of this when he beheld Madame de Maintenon, in the Maréchale d'Albret's drawing-room, " doing her best to bore everybody, now by her silence and now by her pedantic conversation." That was real self-mortification! The Abbé, who held lively talk to be the very salt of life, said to the poor lady, " Madame, I do not know your secret, but you have to do with an indiscreet person."

When he said an indiscreet person, he meant a bore. Yet even when she had blunted all the shafts of her wit that indiscreet director was not content; he found fault with the natural beauty which, in spite of the stiff neckerchiefs she wore, still set the spirit of penitence at naught. He thought Madame Scarron's distinguished appearance somewhat alarming, even now. " But," said the poor lady, " this is only *étamine du Lude*, Sir! " And quite out of heart, the saintly man would answer, " Most honoured lady, I know not what that may be. But when you drop on your knees before me, I see a great quantity of stuffs fall at my feet, and of so pleasing a nature that I feel them to be altogether too admirable! "

Too admirable! Let us take note of the word, it has fallen under suspicion. The intriguers at Versailles, likewise, were to feel there was something altogether too admirable about Madame de Maintenon, and seek an explanation of her singular good fortune in the machinations of the devil. Nobody could have climbed to such a height, and bewitched the affections of a mighty monarch, unless she had more or less sold her own soul; and two of Madame de Maintenon's bitterest detractors were to denounce this particular period of her life, between 1660 and 1670—what we may denominate the hidden period—in the fiercest way, as the most dubious of her whole career. We are still far from the days when the Princess Palatine and the Duc de Saint-Simon were each, according to their individual fancy, to fall upon her memory and load it with every fantastic accusation hatred could invent; yet this appears to be the moment when their assertions should be discussed. Madame Scarron was young, she was free, she was much courted by those about her. She had friends of the stronger sex. Had she lovers?

We will begin by weighing the testimony of the two arch haters. In 1695, when the Duc de Saint-Simon's sharp eyes first began to take stock of the supernumeraries crowding the Versailles stage, he was twenty years of age, and Madame de Maintenon had reached her sixtieth year. She was a living mystery, shut up in the King's private life, never present at any ceremony or festivity, a remote and furtive apparition, slipping across the antechambers in the shadow of her black laces. Even in the days of La Vallière, Louis XIV had said to persons who would have remarked upon his love-affairs, "I desire to be served in the mystery of respect." And so he was; but this silence and mystery brought a secret revenge with them, or in their train. Calumny reared its head to begin with, and grew stronger and stronger by degrees. Though all were aware of her unseen presence and her active power, the origin of this proud and retiring woman remained quite unknown.

When the young Duke began to prosecute his enquiries about the lady, a story that had been current full thirty years before was whispered in his ear. He believed she had been born in the Isles, and that her father "may have been of noble birth." The King's fabulous marriage was far more closely shrouded in the "mystery of respect" than his public love-affairs had ever been. For the initiated this was a solemn pact: not a soul ever breathed a word upon the subject. We may remark that Madame de Sévigné, who dined every evening of her life, for years, in Madame Scarron's company, and who would hold forth endlessly on the matter of Madame de Montespan's ascendancy and all its attendant splendours, never once mentions the King's marriage in her letters to her daughter. Perhaps her former crony had confided something to her; perhaps, the secret once revealed, she had been asked to promise silence. Then, like a faithful friend, she kept her word.

But if a silence so inviolate was maintained as to the glories of the present, what of the past? The young Duke was fairly choked by his astonishment. He never was inside Madame de Maintenon's apartments but once, and then for the space of five minutes, and standing amongst other courtiers. He never spoke a word to her, he never saw one line of her handwriting. Passionately imbued with the love of birth, he said of himself that he had " blood to the tips of his nails; " *i. e.* was sensitive to the last degree, and this sensitiveness was transformed into a frantic longing to use these same nails upon the person of the lady who had led the King, by underhand means, into a shameful alliance, which, he declares, " history will never credit ! " Not being able to speak, he wrote. But when did he write? He tells us that himself: when everybody was dead. Madame de Maintenon had been in her grave for six and twenty years. The marriage, the confiscation of the King by an obscure subject, seemed to him a deformation of the sovereign's person that brought humiliation on everybody else. And then, remembering the anecdotes that had been whispered about, some half-century previously, he drew the picture he desired to see. No contradiction of his dream appeared: in darkness and mystery he built up a work which was not to see the light till both the century and the King himself had long since passed into the silence of the tomb.

Where did Saint-Simon get his information about the poor lady's lovers? That is not very difficult to discover. Let us recollect that from his earliest youth the author of the Memoirs had been the boon companion of the Duc de Chartres, the future Regent, that all he knew of Madame de Maintenon he knew by hearsay, and that all his life he was one of the few familiar guests of Madame, the Princess Palatine. Hatreds soon make common cause. If the Duc de Saint-Simon, coming to the Court, had heard talk about Madame de Maintenon as a child hears talk about any old woman, this was not Madame's case. The Princess, who came to France in 1670, had been a close spectator of Madame Scarron's first appearance and her final triumph. What must her feelings have been on that last occasion? and above all what must they have become?

To understand it all thoroughly, we must go back to Madame's youth, to the *mésalliance* of her father, the Elector, to the shameful supremacy of her governess and his mistress, Sophie von Degenfeld. Even before her marriage, this woman had the Electress and her daughters packed off into the palace garrets: the Elector's legitimate daughter was forsaken, brought up by serving women, received by kind-hearted aunts as though she had been orphaned. If there was one feeling more deeply rooted than another in Madame's mind, it was her horror of low marriages. And when political necessity summoned the stumpy, red-faced little princess out of her German forest, and gave her the brother of the King of France to be her husband, she may well have thought Fate had provided her with her revenge. What eyes, then, can Madame have cast upon this obscure widow, with her grotesque title, when she saw her appear at Versailles as Governess to the King's bastards, and slowly work her way upward till she became the King's friend and counsellor; beheld her drive out the mistresses, and in fact reign, after a fashion? During the first fourteen years of her life at the French Court, Madame was content to despise the buffoon's widow. But the Queen's death and the King's marriage with the Governess were like a convulsion of the natural world, to her; in her eyes this *mésalliance* undermined the whole cosmogony of the Royal House: once the Queen had passed away, she herself should have taken the highest place. And when this cursed shadow passed between her and the sun, hatred entered into Madame's heart. This hatred was a torture to her. Madame, like all the rest, was forced to bow before "the mystery of respect," to put, if not a good face, a face of some sort upon her feelings, write letters that were actually respectful, ask Madame de Maintenon for favours, and thank her after they were done. The extremely courteous little notes between the two ladies, both of them dwellers at Versailles, are still in existence: they bear no resemblance to the savage epistles despatched to Dresden. But in Madame's case, as in that of her young guest the Duc de Saint-Simon, vengeance—a secret vengeance—was a possibility. Each brought a personal quality to serve it: she, her violence; he, his genius. Madame, at her writing-table, would draw, without conviction, it may be, and "in fits of laughter," her portrait of "the old slut," the "witch." Madame revelled in crude language and coarse expressions: safely ensconced in her own room, with her parrots and her dogs, she flung her gibes, well or ill founded, in every direction. The only reliable information she gives us denotes her own character. She was one of those Germans of whom Voltaire was to say that "they think of nothing but their stomachs and their noble ancestry!" The most furious of her letters are dated during the period of her son's Regency. The King being dead, and the old woman "done for," she was free, at last, to snarl as noisily as she chose. Saint-Simon, the Regent's friend and counsellor, and the familiar and highly diverted auditor of Madame's vituperative outpourings, must have spent many a delightful evening listening to the old Princess while she tore the Marquise to tatters. My readers should note the fact that they both ascribe the same lovers to the poor lady, the Villarceaux brothers, three of them, one of whom was twelve years old, and another an invalid, at the time when Madame Scarron was accused of dividing her favours between the three. The Memoir-writer had the story from the Princess.

Let us, therefore, put aside these posthumous accusers' testimony, and turn to the assertions of Madame Scarron's genuine contemporaries. Tallement des Réaux, who had known young Scarron well—Tallement, the most libertine of story-tellers—was himself in doubt. His notice was written when the widow had just retired into the Convent in the Rue Saint-Jacques: as time wore on he would add footnotes to his miniature histories, so as to keep them up to date. He observes, with a certain disappointment, that Madame Scarron has not "taken the leap." This "leap" was eagerly awaited. Would-be lovers were heaving heavy sighs. There was a Monsieur de Barillon who, in later days, seeing the semi-queen pass by in her mysterious majesty, exclaimed, "Was I so mistaken, after all?" There was the courtly Cardinal d'Estrèes, and above all, there was that Villarceaux whose "handsome dark head" Madame Scarron's eyes had sought afar off, on the day of the King's entry into Paris. Villarceaux' adoration of Madame Scarron was no secret: it was a declared passion. His friends made game of it: more clear-sighted than he, they divined the natural and unalterable correctness of conduct which formed the very foundation of the widow's nature. A certain rhymester who drew the portrait of the cruel fair closed his description of her with these lines—

> "Si c'est cette rare beauté
> Qui tient ton esprit enchainé,
> Marquis, j'ai raison de te plaindre!
> Elle a presqu'autant de fierté
> Qu'elle a de grace et de beauté."

And Madame Scarron herself, more in love with honour (as she had said) and friendship than with love, replied, one evening, to the Abbé Testu, who had compared her to a female gaoler—

> "Ah, l'ingrat, le mauvais métier
> Que le métier de géolière!
> Il faut etre barbare et fière,
> Il faut faire enrager un pauvre prisonnier!
> Non! ce n'est pas là ma manière!
> Tous ceux qui sont dans mes liens
> D'eux-mèmes sont venus s'y rendre.
> Je n'ai pas cherché les moyens
> De leur plaire ni les surprendre.
> Prison ou liberté je leur donne à choisir.
> Je leur dis donc, sans être vaine:
> Je prends mes captifs sans plaisir,
> Et je sais les garder sans peine!"

Yet one witness there is against the accused, and a contemporary witness too, as to this matter of Villarceaux' passion. Towards the year 1702, Saint-Evremond, hunting about for information, put some questions concerning the youthful days of Madame Scarron to the aged Ninon, one fine day. She returned him the following enigmatic answer: "A time has come when I have forgotten everything except my friends: you may imagine, after that, how astonished I was to read your fresh questions through my spectacles! S—— was my friend, his wife procured me a thousand pleasures with her talk, and at one time I thought her too stiff for love. As to details, I never knew any, never saw anything; but I often lent my yellow chamber to her and Villarceaux."

When Ninon had been questioned, on previous occasions, about Madame Scarron, she had only shaken her head. About Madame Scarron's virtue she did not care a snap, one way or the other, but she believed in it. She would say to Fontenelle with a touch of scorn, "Madame Scarron was always correct in her conduct, but she was not fitted for love!" and again, "Madame de Maintenon was virtuous out of weakmindedness. I tried to cure her, but she was too much afraid of God!"

A fresh attempt was in progress, evidently, when Saint-Evremond wrote her that letter in 1702. People were bent on knowing, on finding out—it would have been so amusing! But Ninon, with her eighty-seven years on her back, has no suspicions, she is "quite astonished by these fresh questions!" Pressure is put upon her. As to Scarron's wife? No! She never saw anything, never was aware of anything. "But I often lent my yellow chamber to her and Villarceaux." Was it in connection with Villarceaux, then, that the questions had been asked? A dim light breaks upon her aged brain: Saint-Evremond has stirred a supposition of the most entertaining kind: she leaves him to make his own comment on the mystery.

Dare we attempt an explanation? We know the nuns of the Petite Charité thought the widow saw "a tremendous amount of company." Did they take some exception to her visitors of the opposite sex? Mademoiselle de l'Enclos did hold a Court of Love, but, being a professional dispenser of witty sayings, she sought at the same time to attract the fashionable world about her. As a widow, Madame Scarron went, as we know, to Ninon's house. Did she really receive, in Ninon's yellow chamber, the visits Villarceaux was debarred from paying her in her convent? We must not forget that the word chamber did not carry, in those days, the intimate meaning it now suggests. The Queen received her Ministers in her "grey chamber": the most ethereal conversations of the *précieuses* were carried on in alcoves, beside the beds in which the fair *alcovistes*, as they were called, lay stretched full length. In their beds, lying, as it were, in state, young brides received the congratulations, and widows the condolences, of all their friends. If the young widow had really "taken the leap" in that "yellow chamber," the shrewd Ninon would not have waited forty years, and the advent of her spectacles, before seeing and knowing something about the matter.

Let us rather rely on Tallement des Réaux, who, as he pursues the course of his enquiries, sets forth, in a footnote to his chapter on Madame Scarron, that "She has a pension of between 2500 and 3000 *livres*, and a very modest household. Villarceaux still goes there. But she is a great prude."

Yet we will not here assert Madame Scarron's virtue to be already beyond discussion. Before we can be sure whether Madame de Maintenon was really and truly a woman of character or an impostor, we must follow her for many a year yet, to that old age in which she tells her own story, at last, and reveals her inmost being. The correspondence of that aged and devout woman, reviewing the faults and errors of her past life for the benefit of her most intimate confidant, and with a freedom as complete as that of a religious confession, will teach us more about her than all the chroniclers of her own days, or after them, can ever teach. At the present moment we have no certain knowledge: already Madame Scarron is something of a riddle to us. When all the elements of a being, a sentient creature, can once be established, then indeed, will many a veil be lifted. Let us then follow our heroine step by step, let us scrutinize every line of her character, lest it should escape us, and let us trust the recluse of Saint-Cyr, who will hide nothing from us, to make herself clear.

CHAPTER IV

THE EDUCATION OF THE KING'S CHILDREN

Louis XIV and Madame de Montespan—The education of the King's children—Madame de Montespan, the d'Albret's cousin, and Madame de Maintenon—The post of governess offered: a case of conscience—The Confessor's view: a false position—The house in the Rue de Vaugirard.

In a society grown wiser, then, and under the care of watchful directors of her conscience, Madame Scarron attained the highest rank in the esteem and friendship of those about her. Already the first links of her "chain of happiness," as she called it in her later days, wondering the while at her own good fortune, lay in her grasp. What future dreams did she nurse at the age of thirty-one?

In 1666 the little circle in which she chiefly lived received a shock. The Queen Mother, eaten up with cancer, was dying fast. Louis XIV gave proof of his filial devotion. He wept at his mother's bedside while the last sacraments were administered under the light of the huge tapers in her sick-room. Marie-Thérèse wept too, whispering "*Si la pierdo, que haré?*" The dying woman clasped her hands—such beautiful hands, still—and prayed for her son: then, her failing eyes fixed on the young couple kneeling by her bed, she murmured to her Spanish confidante, "*Ah! Molina! Estos hijos!*" Those children!

The King was twenty-eight. He had felt the restraint his mother's presence had imposed. But now his youth and passions soon wiped out his grief. Everything about him spoke of pleasure and of liberty. The memory of his ancestors was hardly calculated to inspire him with any leaning towards a life of chastity. From Charles V, from Henri IV, on the Spanish side as on the French, there had been mistresses in troops, and processions of bastards. Had he not lived in intimacy with Vendôme? Had not Beaufort, grandson of Gabrielle d'Estrées, well-nigh rivalled him in the popular affections? Mistresses, bastards, these—the sophism was dear to the young monarch's heart—were a sovereign's prerogative. Queen Marie-Thérèse began by mourning her mother-in-law, after the Spanish fashion, with noisy lamentation, and then shut herself up with her Spanish attendants and confessors, and prepared, like the women at Madrid and the princesses of her own family, to spend her life in a state of devout resignation.

Now the great secrets of the Court spread abroad; society could discuss them at its leisure: La Vallière was the "recognized" mistress. The romantic period of hidden loves, of frolics in the darkness, of nocturnal wanderings in the thickets of Fontainebleau, of ballets founded on allegories that half revealed the truth, was past. There was an end to mystery: the King imposed his whim upon his Court. From time to time, in Advent or in Lent, the preachers might do their duty, and call on monarchs to live chastely: he, the monarch, would perform his by creating great and glorious armies, and crowning his own head with rays of victory.

The young ladies and gentlemen of the Court were by no means grieved to see Cupid's entry into the Saint-Germain ballets. The Queen's Maids of Honour considered the rule of the Maréchale de Navailles, who was responsible for their behaviour, decidedly severe. Had not a bevy of workmen appeared one day, in response to the Maréchale's summons, to fit and fix gratings into the entrance of the apartment occupied by the chosen company of fair girls, and so prevent their gallant admirers from approaching them? The very next morning the gratings were removed, and the King was heard to remark, with quite imperturbable gravity, that he concluded "the spirits had taken them down!" The Maréchale had them put back again; but this time the King grew angry, and signed a letter directing the Duchesse to retire to her country seat. When the King's order was handed to her, the courageous lady, a worthy cousin of Françoise d'Aubigné, was reading Plutarch's Lives.

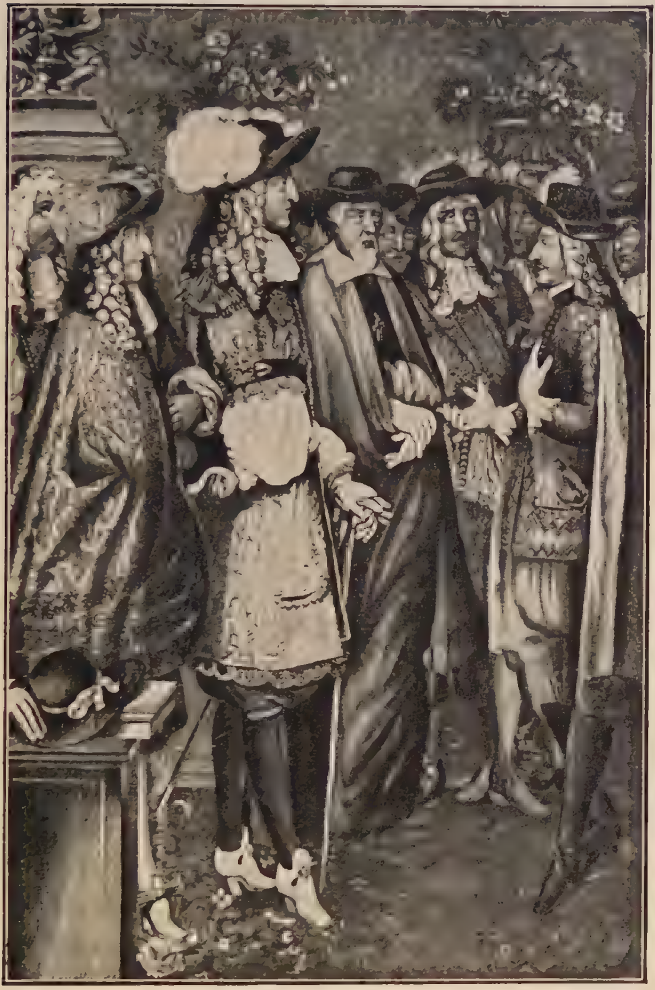
The departure of the Duchesse de Navailles, and the appointment, in her place, of Julie d'Angennes, Duchesse de Montausier, marked the second stage in the licence the monarch claimed as to his private life, after the death of the Queen Mother.

At once Bossuet, the Court Preacher, began to utter clear and solemn warnings from the pulpit of the Palace chapel. The charm of those days lies in their characteristic strength and boldness: there was no underhand dealing. Louis XIV replied to these public reproofs by an ostentatious display of his forbidden passion. Hardly a year after Anne of Austria's death, Mademoiselle de Blois, his third child by La Vallière, was legitimized by letters patent, and with the approval of Parliament. The mother, much against her will, was made a Duchess.

Yes! Sorely against her will! The public read her triumph in her high position, but La Vallière herself read in it the omen of her fall: she read it in the heart she knew so well. To take her thus out of the shade was to make an end of their hidden life, the only life in which a forbidden love can possibly endure. Had the King some other love? Was he submitting himself to the admonitions of the preachers? La Vallière was troubled in her mind. At night, sitting at cards with the King in her little house in the Rue de la Pompe, she clearly felt that, Duchess though she was, and the acknowledged mother of a legitimized princess, she was the recipient, likewise, of a gift, a royal gift indeed, but one that portended her own dismissal. She grew sad, and pale, and faded; the King was bored in her company: once he had forced his caprice upon others his own act had broken the charm. La Vallière was not the sort of woman to play the glittering part of a public mistress; she was the gentle mistress of a moonlit night. She was filled with alarm when the King, always silent, now, and sometimes listless too, cut the game short; and she was more uneasy yet when she saw her royal lover unbend under the charm of the merry Maids of Honour, with their sharp wit and ringing peals of hearty laughter.

Of all the merry crew, Athénais de Mortemart, the young Marquise de Montespan, was the boldest. Gay by nature, merciless in her comical inventions, she was a mistress of darts to pierce a rival's heart. The temptation to drive the lame comrade out into the darkness had become a torture to her: once entered on the struggle, she was resolved to win the victory. Accompanied by the Comtesse de Soissons, she began to frequent the nocturnal receptions of magicians and fortune-tellers. At the garden-gate of the woman Voisin's house at Villeneuve-sur-Gravots, these two suppliants for the Devil's aid came knocking, masked and in secret, so that she might read the future in their little palms. From chiromancy they went on to magic, and from magic to downright sorcery, begging philters and talismans, to make one of them the King's mistress, and cast an evil spell upon La Vallière. Then Voisin poured the dust of dried-up toads and the blood of pigeons offered in sacrifice into a golden box. She performed incantations in the course of which a heart to represent La Vallière's was shaped in wax, and then pierced through with long pins: with loud appeals the witch called death down upon the favourite's head. And one night, in the Château of Villeboussin, lying far away behind deep moats, Madame de Montespan sold herself body and soul to the demon, and abandoned herself utterly to the horrors of the black mass.

The devil kept his bargain: the King's heart went to the highest bidder. Seated at La Vallière's card-table in the Rue de la Pompe, Madame de Montespan poured out the brilliant talk with which her frantic hopes and longings had inspired her, and the King laughed at her witty jeers. He was making preparations for his campaign in Flanders: Madame de Montespan's domineering boldness was a secret response to his own anticipation of rapid operations and swift victory; this new love was to be the brilliant harbinger of his conquests. When the King departed to the army, in June 1667, he invited his Court to follow him. The Queen made room in her coach for Madame de Montespan: she was absorbed in the satisfaction of perceiving that the



Louis XIV receiving the Spanish Ambassador, Count de Fuentès (1662)

Duchesse de la Vallière was not to be a member of the travelling party. But La Vallière possessed that quality of blundering boldness peculiar to weak natures. She left Saint-Germain, and followed at a distance behind the procession of coaches that moved towards the North. At Avesnes, she saw the royal tents pitched on some high ground, and with a fine scorn of etiquette ordered her people to drive her coach full speed into the King's camp. The King received her with the greatest coldness: to all her sighs he replied with laconic politeness, " Madame, I do not like to be forced!" And when the Queen appeared, with Madame de Montespan in her train, he was pleased to express his satisfaction at seeing them. It was in this military encampment at Avesnes, which provided facilities of so superior a nature for chance meetings, that Madame de Montespan suffered "the misfortune" of becoming the King's mistress.

This time His Majesty had to face not only the thunders of the Court preachers, but also the outcry, even more annoying, of Monsieur de Montespan: this lady, this born paramour, was a married woman, a prisoner in the official meshes of the law. Insolently, brutally, the husband "played the watchdog," as Madame de Montespan called it. There he stood, right in the King's way, full of solemn wrath and fury, pouring forth noisy protests. One day he pretended his wife was dead, celebrated her funeral rites, walked in widower's weeds, followed by his lackeys in mourning liveries, behind a silver coffin. Madame de Montespan went into fits of laughter over her mock funeral, but none the less she was vexed, and scornfully remarked: "My dog and my parrot provide amusement for the rabble!"

And yet, by law, she was a wife, still a wife, and shortly to become the mother of a child that would officially belong to her husband, to the "little rascal!"

These considerations cast a shadow over the triumph of the royal loves. Louis XIV grew nervous, resorted to humiliating subterfuges. La Vallière was used as a screen, she became what Bussy-Rabutin called "the pretext" between the King and her rival. Officially she continued to be his mistress. Madame de Montespan fell in with these pretences: when both ladies walked abroad with the King, she would lean playfully on La Vallière's arm. When the King and the ladies of the Court were with the armies, Louvois saw to it that arrangements were made which permitted the King to reach Madame de Montespan's lodging when he had apparently entered that of Madame de La Vallière. "The King's service," he said, "extended to every matter." The King put himself into his servants' hands.

Who then was to bring up the child Madame de Montespan was about to bring into the world? What lips would be discreet enough, what house sufficiently safe, sufficiently retired, to shelter the bastard, fruit on both sides of an adulterous passion? The King, it should be remarked, had not been fortunate with regard to his children. At the moment of which we write, he had already lost four out of the five the Queen had borne him. The elder of his two children by La Vallière had also died on Madame Colbert's hands. Of his legitimate line, only the melancholy Dauphin now remained, and of the other, only the roguish little Mademoiselle de Blois and the baby Comte de Vermandois. In the case of the child he now expected something more than secrecy was indispensable, there must be caution: kidnappers, poisoners, danger of every kind threatened its existence—even the very light of day.

Then Madame de Montespan bethought her of Madame Scarron. She had known her well in her cousin Madame d'Albret's house; she had no husband, no lover, she was the confidante to whom the deepest mysteries were entrusted, she was initiated into innumerable business matters. We may be perfectly certain that if Madame Scarron had been suspected of having any amorous intrigue, of possessing any lover, the King's anxious idol would never have dreamt of confiding her secret to her. The widow's poverty, her isolated position, would render it easier for her to live, for the time being, at least, in the shadow of a life of obscurity. Madame d'Heudicourt—that Mademoiselle de Pons about whose marriage Madame de Maintenon had taken so much pains—was at that moment the very accommodating confidante of the mysterious love-affair at Saint-Germain. No doubt she was employed to sound Madame Scarron.

The widow hesitated; she sought advice. Here was a strange Court office! Its duties bore little resemblance to those she saw discharged by her brilliant friends, Ladies of Honour, Ladies of the Bedchamber: she was being invited to connive at adultery, and embrace a kind of servitude into the bargain. She called on her director, the Abbé Gobelin, to decide this question of conscience for her, and in the solution he finally adopted we recognize a faithful embodiment of the whole spirit of the period.

A distinction was drawn between the King and the King's mistress: she was nothing at all, he was the King. It was foreseen, perhaps, that if the child was ever legitimized, the mother, permanently bound to Monsieur de Montespan, would not be mentioned. Madame Scarron would be doing wrong if she agreed to bring up, even in secret, a child who was the fruit of Madame de Montespan's adultery with an unknown father, or even a father whom the world, thanks to certain carefully engineered appearances, might be left to believe was Lauzun. But if the King himself intervened, avowed his paternity, requested Madame Scarron to bring up the child of the King of France, then his subject could not claim any right to look into the matter: she would obey an order, would be amenable to the King and to nobody but the King; the very existence of the secret would establish a bond of confidence between the Governess and her Master. Madame Colbert had already accepted a similar post about the first set of bastards and was still performing its duties. Mistresses would come and go, but their children remained: this child would belong to the King and not to anybody else. Madame de Montespan knew that right well. Even in her triumph she was full of fears, perpetually under the threat of the Church, of the "good people," of the scandals put about by her jealous husband, and by her own rivals. She was trying her strength, but did she dare to hope, at that time, that her strength would hold out for fourteen years?

She was a believer, she feared the wrath of God, and being a daughter of Ashtaroth, she likewise feared the Devil.

Madame Scarron must have had an interview with the King to settle the details of her undertaking, for she told her daughters at Saint-Cyr long afterwards that in this matter of secrecy she had pledged her word to the King in person. With that sovereign ease of his, Louis XIV, strong in the conviction of his divine right to reign and beget children, commanded his subject to undertake the care of the infant which was his offspring. And when, the audience over, Madame Scarron, having made her own conditions and accepted the proffered post, sank in deep farewell obeisance before the King, she passed, like Louvois, like Colbert, but under the ægis of her own director, into the "mystery of respect."

The birth of the first child, a girl, took place in Paris, in a secluded dwelling round which great trees grew, and environed by every precaution a desire for the utmost secrecy could suggest. Madame Scarron, masked, entered Madame de Montespan's apartment; she was present at the infant's birth, took "the King's" child, wrapped it in her scarf, carried it off, and being unable to keep it in her own home, conveyed it to a small house in the outskirts of Paris prepared for its reception, in which its nurses were awaiting its arrival.

It was at this moment, no doubt, that her life as a convent boarder came to an end. The secrecy to which she was bound, the necessary change in her habits, her nocturnal expeditions, her early morning reappearances, were hardly suitable to a conventual residence. She took a lodging in the Rue des Tournelles, quite close, still, to the Hôtel d'Albret and the Hôtel Richelieu, for her friends' society attracted her as much as ever. But when her secret duties made her disappearance necessary she would suddenly become invisible and utterly inscrutable; and so terrified was she of any discovery, she tells us, that she would have herself bled so as to avoid flushing when the d'Albret cousins mentioned Madame de Montespan in her presence.

The second child was born in the following year. Decidedly the favourite retained her power! This child was the Duc du Maine. By giving this name, that of a royal apanage, to his son, the King signified his ultimate intention of making him a prince. It was at Saint-Germain, this time, in the midst of a Court over which Marie-Thérèse reigned as Queen, and where La Vallière was still the King's official mistress, that the babe was brought into the world, in the "apartment of the ladies." Nobody ventured to bring a mere outsider like Madame Scarron into the palace precincts. Lauzun, the King's confidant, who served Madame de Montespan as her "pretext" just as La Vallière served the King, carried the infant away, wrapped in his cloak. There had not even been time to swathe the little body. It was hastily wrapped in swaddling-clothes, and so ill-guarded were the secrets of that Court that it had to be carried right through the Queen's apartments. The park once reached, a coach, in which Madame Scarron sat, was found standing outside a little gate. She took the second child and hid it, with another nurse, in yet another little house.

And then, in greater mystery than ever, she began to move to and fro between one child and the other, dropping out of sight for days and nights at a time. It was a trait of her nature, and also one of the results of her struggling and troubled life, that together with her elevated views and—at a later date—her great purposes, she possessed as clear a conception of the whole of an undertaking as of its details. To the work of bringing up these children and guarding her secret the while, she gave her personal effort, worked with her own hands, chose the food the children were to eat, regulated the temperature of the rooms in which they lived. Sitting by the cradles of the little ones whose existence was so entirely committed to her charge, she felt the first stirrings of that vocation as an educator which was her genuine taste. She possessed neither the jealous tenderness nor the partiality of a real mother, but she was a perfect governess. She, too, shared the spirit of her times; her conscience was clear, no scruple assailed her. As an old woman living at Saint-Cyr, she was to regret having carried her desire to be esteemed to the point of downright folly, but she talked to her daughters about her post as Governess quite frankly, as of an honour. "That singular kind of honour," she was to say, still later, to the Ladies of Saint-Cyr, "was to cost me infinite pains!" Even workmen and upholsterers must be kept outside the doors. "I used to get on a ladder," she says, "to do their work myself, for they must not be allowed to come in. The nurses would never put their hands to a thing, for fear they might be tired and their milk less good. . . . Often I would go from one nurse to the other, in disguise, carrying a basket full of linen and meat on my arm, and I would sometimes spend the whole night with one of the children lying sick in a house outside Paris. I used to get back into my home in the mornings by a back door, and after I had dressed I would get into a coach at the front door to drive to the Hôtel d'Albret or the Hôtel Richelieu, so that my habitual companions should not even know I had a secret."

What was the motive that inspired Madame Scarron with such devotion? What was the influence that enabled her to play her ungrateful part? Was it ambition? The King had, it is true, promised her a reward, a recompense. But the nature of that recompense remained unspecified. Can she possibly have suspected, when she slipped out of Paris carrying food and clothing for the children under her hooded cloak, anything of that future which was to be the wonder of history? She held an office: she was the Governess; a single day, an angry word, might break the filmy thread, woven in the darkness, that bound her to the monarch. Vainly shall we search her letters, those authentic letters as recognizable as the sound of some well-known voice, among all La Baumelle's fabrications, for any indication of her thoughts or of her dreams. Concerning that which was the great business of her life, just then, she says not a word.

An excellent family woman, she writes to Madame de Villette at Niort, she preserves her old affection for Mursay. Her desire is to serve the family from which she springs, and advance its interests. Her secret connection with the

Court, her constant intercourse with Louvois, who administers the King's conquests and regulates the expenses of his bastard children, her friendly relations with the Maréchal d'Albret, place her in a position to mention the son of her kind aunt, Philippe de Villette, to write about him, and recommend him. He is a naval officer, out of favour because of his Protestant faith, and anxious to have the command of one of the King's galleys. Young Madame de Villette begs for news of the fashions, and to know how she may be something of the Paris lady even in the depths of her province. Madame Scarron bears it all in mind, whether it be useful or agreeable. Philippe fails to get his galley, and fancies it would be a great piece of good fortune if he could be appointed Ambassador in Muscovy. "Yet," writes his cousin, "your religion may prove as great an obstacle to this embassy as to all other advantages to which you might aspire." Thus did the moralist slip in her word, and added, "I would not have such reasons as these to be the motives of your conversion, but I confess it would be a great joy to me to see you secure both your future fortunes and your salvation!"

Make his fortune and his soul! Here was a tempting prospect for a disappointed naval officer! Let him think it over in his Huguenot tower. She was trying, too, to get her brother, Charles d'Aubigné, Constant's true son, into the King's service. He had inherited his father's indolent nature and extravagant tastes. So long as she had been a needy widow, Charles had let himself drop out of his sister's ken. He had served in the army, wandering hither and thither as his campaigning life had led him, overbearing to the weak, humble to the great, gambling away the money borrowed to supply his regiment with clothing. Now that his sister moved in the great world, he claimed relationship. But his sister trembled at the thought of seeing the great name of d'Aubigné tarnished a second time. She showered affectionate letters on her brother, sent him good advice, made attempts to serve him. "I love you tenderly," she wrote, "and I am persuaded that your feelings for me are unchanged. Thus, my dear brother, our fortunes will be common to us both, and they will not always be as unhappy as they have been!" Hope was beginning to spring up, and that for the whole family. This was not, as has been believed, the ambition of a Governess envious of a favourite and dreaming of palace revolutions; it was the labour of a woman who had undertaken a business that had failed, and was bent on setting it on its feet once more. And for herself—the King had said it—the reward, the recompense, was to come some day. Liberty was her dream: a house, a landed property, something that should restore her to her place in the traditions of bygone days.

So far for matters temporal. Under the Abbé Gobelin's guidance, eternal salvation and earthly fortunes were in full agreement. But when the director of Madame Scarron's conscience placed her in the fort, he was certainly pursuing a higher object yet. Another person's salvation stood in need of protection, and there was not a pious soul in France that did not think upon it with anxiety, nay, even with tears,—the salvation of the King. At Court all was flattery and compliance, but in the Church, wherever pious people gathered themselves together, in every convent, there was deep mourning over the scandalous fame of the King's public amours. Official or private, indeed, they were well known: their secrecy was a mere formality. Out of the depths of those sanctuaries of the godly within whose walls numbers of women who had forsaken the world, but were scarcely separated from it, received their dear ones, hearkened to their pious sighs and lamentations, and were implored by them to intercede with the Most High for the erring King, incessant supplication rose to Heaven. Could it be possible that he should still cling to the impious aberrations of an adulterous existence? Young girls offered themselves up in sacrifice and took the veil, to obtain the conversion of their King, as they might have done it for a father or an erring brother. We may be sure that when Madame Scarron received her orders from the King, she was given others, secret orders, by the director to whom she had submitted her existence.

Already she is being transformed, in the Abbé Gobelin's hands, into that instrument of her Church destined to recognize its own power and increase it, as time goes on. She was to undertake, as it were, a certain mission in connection with the sovereign's path. As far as the King was concerned she must await an hour that was as yet uncertain; but in Madame de Montespan's case she was to be the direct agent of her conversion, setting her the good example, and atoning by her own sincere devotion for the austerity of the counsels she put forward. Finally, she was to teach these dangerous children, these future princes, the precepts of the Church. There was little to be hoped from them, there was much to fear. Was it a definite programme? That we do not know; but, judging by the manner in which it was carried out, it was conceived, we may be sure, by a far-sighted intelligence, and that not Madame Scarron's alone. The widow destined to be the Governess and instructress of the bastard princes was to make them, since they must live and grow up, into "good people." The work of conversion, of saving souls, was to be conducted from afar.

It will be said that the position was a false one. It certainly was; and the secret of Madame de Maintenon's unpopularity lies in the falseness of the situation she accepted, and in which (it may have been out of sheer pride), wrapped in mystery as it was, and confident as she was in herself and her own intentions, she found a satisfaction. Thanks to the life she had lived as a member of a small nobleman's family, fallen from its former estate, who had returned to her natural orbit, and thanks also to her own mental character (that of a militant Catholic, imbued, nevertheless, with the Reforming spirit), she was already familiar with the contradictions of earthly life. Had she not been an orphan, so to speak, during the lifetime of that sorry father of hers? And then a wife "without being married," a Puritan who read Plutarch and lived at close quarters with a burlesque poet? Now we see her a mother, "without being a mother," of children socially of the highest condition, and morally of the lowest; the confidante, to boot, and even, according to appearances, the accomplice, of an adulterous intercourse which she only serves so that she may fight the infection it is but too likely to disseminate. By more secret but more steadily continuous methods she was to work for those who were bent on the King's conversion. There was to be a sustained effort, from this time forward, to secure the sovereign's salvation and that of his children. Bossuet was still to pour forth his weighty remonstrances, and Bourdaloue to shatter the silence with his thunderclaps of eloquence, but those voices were too distant, their words fell from too high an altitude. When Madame Scarron slipped, masked and veiled, within the door of the secluded dwelling that sheltered the infant wailings of the Duc du Maine, she had already attained the first approaches of a stronghold destined to be won by slow degrees, conquered, and at last converted, the sovereign's heart.

The period of absolute mystery was not a long one; it was followed by a time of secrecy. When the third child was born, Madame Scarron, who could not be answerable for so widely scattered a nursery, settled, by royal command, into a roomy and handsome house at the farthest end of the Vaugirard quarter of Paris. This, in those days, meant to be practically in the country. Here she received the three children already born into the world. Before long, the eldest died, but its place was very soon filled by another. Madame de Montespan performed her functions with a royal liberality. This bringing of princes into the world secured her own position. We may say, once for all, that she bore the King seven children. To give reasonable colour to her life of retirement, Madame Scarron took Madame d'Heudicourt's daughter to live with her. Among her friends she passed as being absorbed by the care of the child's education. But four children, in reality, ran and played about the lawns behind those high walls, and within the great house. Sometimes the King would come to see his children; he paid a chilly homage to the devotion of their Governess, feeling but scant liking, himself, for the gravity of mind, the sober elegant speech, in which he could detect signs of a delicate culture and pure taste. "I do not like your *bel esprit*," he would say to Madame de Montespan. Louvois, too, came to inspect the royal nurseries from time to time: he managed the expenditure. Neither did the "man of marble," as he was called, hold this high-principled Governess in any affection.

Then it was that Madame Scarron, whose secret duties often stood in the way of her going into general society, grew into a closer intimacy with Madame de Sévigné and Madame de La Fayette. These ladies had formed a small circle of friends who delighted in sitting together in their own homes, and in pleasant conversation. They had no finger in any intrigue, and yet, being curious by their natures, they enjoyed philosophizing together on matters of the Court and of society. In these gatherings Madame Scarron, whom her friends had always seen rather cold and circumspect than otherwise, would unbosom herself to her companions, and they, charmed with the trustful fashion in which she revealed her heart to them, called her *The Thaw*. This trio of ladies knew how to split straws in their discourse on men and things. La Rochefoucauld, the whilom leader of the Fronde, was their intellectual director; he admired the laconic and yet animated conversation of *The Thaw*. Madame de La Fayette, a melancholy, ailing creature, was known as *The Fog*. What name did they bestow on the Marquise de Sévigné? Was it *The Spring*, out of which her abundant wit and kindliness bubbled forth so endlessly? Madame de Coulanges, full of buoyant merriment, was dubbed *The Leaf*. Now and then the Abbé Testu would come in to supper: he was always likely to be found where witty talk and badinage abounded, and as he grew really angry when the ladies contradicted his assertions on literary subjects he was given the title of *The Thunderstorm*. The company met either in Madame de La Fayette's house or in that of the Marquise. Madame de Grignan was not forgotten. Her idolizing mother would read her daughter's letters to her friends, and all the more willingly because of the affinity between the nature of the Governess of Provence and that of the Governess of the bastard princes; in each case there was the same gravity with a touch of sadness in it, the same love of philosophizing. "I have been supping with Quantova's friend," writes Madame de Sévigné; "you will not be attacked in that country without being well defended!" Madame Scarron was born to understand a being who was herself the personification of reason, wisdom, and philosophy, and to defend her against a "foolish, unjust, and frivolous mother." And through the Marquise, the sage exile in Provence and Madame Scarron would interchange delightful messages of mutual sympathy.

The Thaw opens her heart: then it is that Madame Sévigné writes, "her talk is delicious." *The Thaw* feels the charm of Madame de Sévigné's genuine and spontaneous nature. When Madame de La Fayette has her "vapours," a not unfrequent occurrence, she receives her friends lying in the gold-laced bed, in her great bedchamber in the Rue de Vaugirard: her window opens on a garden, in which a tinkling fountain plays. Monsieur de la Rochefoucauld is seated there, beside his friend, in the high-backed chair he comes to occupy every day; and with him the fair logicians polish every facet of some thought eventually to be transformed into a Maxim.

The old-time leader of the Fronde has grown wise, but his wisdom is bitter in its very essence. Madame Scarron, for other reasons, belongs to the same school, and being vowed to secrecy, has entered on a life of solitude. Her hands were always busy, and as she talked she would work at her tapestry, or turn her spinning-wheel. In cheerful peace the hours wore on, striking one by one from the clock of the Carmelite convent over the way. The friends would betake themselves together to Benediction or to *Tenebrae*, or go to the *Incurables*, close by, to visit Madame de la Sablière. Then came supper: "We sup every night with Madame Scarron," writes Madame de Sévigné to her daughter; "her intelligence is delightful, and so wonderfully upright!" And last of all, when curfew had rung, they would attend Madame Scarron back to her mysterious dwelling in the depths of Vaugirard.

There were days, too, when *The Thaw* received Madame de Sévigné, Madame de La Fayette, Madame de Coulanges, in her own great house. Her friends took good care to refrain from indiscreet inquiries, but the Great Letter-writer would relate to her daughter afterwards that she had seen fine liveries, a large garden, well-kept surroundings, a handsomely dressed friend who wore " gold trimmings on her silk gown." The days of the *étamine du Lude* and the coarse grey stuffs were gone : not a shade of difference escaped the visitors' eyes.

But if a child were exhibited, it was always Madame d'Heudicourt's little daughter; and with the perfect taste which remains in our minds as the most wonderful attribute of that period, nobody spoke a word concerning the King's secret. Though the visitors may not have been able to restrain a certain eagerness in the glances they cast towards the shady walks or the broad patches of shadow beneath the trees, they refrained, at all events, from any excessive display of curiosity, and from allusions that would have driven *The Thaw* down to freezing point again. " As for Madame Scarron," writes *The Spring*, " she leads a most astounding life. No mortal, without any exception, has any intercourse with her, and if I receive a letter from her, I take good care not to make any boast of it, for fear of the endless questions that would bring upon me." They knew everything, but they said, they asked, above all they wrote, nothing at all. Finger on lip, these prudent friends respected the King's secret, kept the silence he had commanded.

Then came a time when the King, growing fonder of his children, desired to see them at Saint-Germain. Madame Scarron would take them down in her coach, carefully closed, to pay their visit to the Palace. Madame d'Heudicourt, the confidante, lent her apartment : the King would come to it, Madame de Montespan would join him, and there father, mother, and children would take part in the strangest of family gatherings. The youthful Dauphin, sole survivor of the five children Marie-Thérèse had borne the King, was already in the harsh though careless hands of his Governors :

the official son was the property of France, his education carried on according to the ancient rites, but without a scintilla of tenderness; he was the child of the State, a big, dull, heavy boy. It was in the children of his love that the King delighted. The little Duc du Maine was full of coaxing ways, and promised to display both wit and grace. The wet-nurses would bring in the youngest babies. Then the King, making a joke out of the mystery, would say to one of the nurses, " But whose child is this? " and the simple country-woman would reply, " I do not know, but by the care that is taken of them they must surely be the children of some great person, perhaps a Judge of the High Courts! " And the King and Madame de Montespan would go into fits of laughter.

After these visits, during which Madame Scarron, puritan and moralist, must surely have realized all the discomforts of her false position, the talk between the ladies at Madame de La Fayette's house, or Madame de Sévigné's, grew more lively than ever. If they did not make any open reference to the secret, they drew near it, nay, quite close to it; and we may believe the veil of concealment was fairly dropped when Madame Scarron told her friends of the " horrible tumults in a country she knew so well." These " horrible tumults " did not seem to portend an extremely lengthy reign. Bossuet, the Court Chaplain, was proclaiming the vanity of idols to the very faces of the King and his mistress; in the Chapel at Saint-Germain he would denounce the evil in language so majestic that the King, though his pride still refused to bend, was literally thunderstruck. Emboldened by Bossuet's example, other Court preachers took courage, and thundered on their own account. The King, who had always preserved an innate sense of the importance of the powers around him, sent for one of these prophets, and said to him, " Father, I am quite prepared to accept my portion according to God's word, but I do not like to be informed of it."

In 1673, that which might still, so far as the general public was concerned, be called a secret, was declared. The Dutch war and its victories had brought the King a prestige hitherto unknown in the civilized world. Everything he touched succeeded. The moment was propitious; and the King, just returned from his campaign, asked and obtained the assent of Parliament to the legitimization of the three lately born children, whose paternity he accepted without any mention of their mother's name. She was married, and was destined to remain in that condition: so far as the law was concerned she did not exist, was never to exist. The children were the King's sole property, and he desired they should be princes of the State. People asked themselves, not unnaturally, whether this bold demand was a deliberate defiance of public morality, or, as in La Vallière's case, a symptom of weakening passion in the King. This love which had endured for fourteen years depended on a slender thread, the royal fancy; some sign of its failure might appear at any moment. Parliament, when it granted the King these letters of legitimization, absolved him once again from his offence. Madame Scarron was more than delighted to see a document that ensured their royal parentage to her little princes: "Hitherto they have belonged to the King," she said, "now they belong to France!" They would make splendid leaders for the King's armies: Dunois would be their patron saint. Madame Scarron now became the adoptive mother of Princes of the State. She certainly cannot fail to have been gratified. Was this to be the end of the love affair? Hopes rose high. Openly and in secret, the work was still to be carried on. Heaven was deafened with supplications, the lovers' chamber beset with remonstrances. Proud even in her misconduct, Madame de Montespan claimed to be pious in spite of all. Those who had witnessed her triumph might also have seen her issue, with reddened eyes and furious countenance, from the confessional of her parish church, after some humble Capuchin had refused her absolution. She had all the bread she consumed during Passion Week carefully weighed, and when somebody smiled at her scruples she said, quite seriously, "Is it a reason, because I do one wrong thing, that I should do all the rest?" She was seen to hold long conversations with Madame Scarron.

The friend whose acquaintance she had originally made in the serious society of the d'Albrets and the Richelieus must certainly have added her own admonitions to those of the directors and confessors. Madame de Montespan listened without expressing any anger, she may even have gone so far as to make some promise. She had always been aware that though Madame Scarron was bringing up the " children of the King," she was her, Madame de Montespan's, opponent, that she sided with the party that was bent on the King's conversion. Madame Scarron must have been preaching, and Madame de Montespan must have promised to make an endeavour to live virtuously, when the favourite, after her fifth confinement, wrote to the Governess as follows : " Come to me, but do not look at me with those black eyes of yours, that frighten me ! "

Let there be no mistake ! Madame Scarron was in no sense Madame de Montespan's " creature," nor her hired Governess; neither, at any time, was she Madame de Montespan's rival. She belonged, openly, to the camp in which prayers were perpetually offered for the King's conversion, where everybody was labouring in the same cause. Yet the falseness of the two situations was self-evident; for the moment, the King's capricious heart was in the favourite's keeping, and the Governess had certain important duties which she must perform in dependence on the King's will. Madame de Montespan might fall, any day, into disgrace, and thence into oblivion. Madame Scarron, with maternal care, was bringing up children who belonged, officially, to " the King and to France."

CHAPTER V

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MADAME DE MAINTENON AND MADAME DE MONTESPAN

Madame Scarron at Saint-Germain—Her desire to retire—Her disagreements with Madame de Montespan—The Maintenon property—A gift from the King—The Confessors' struggle—The King's liking for Madame de Maintenon—Fall of Madame de Montespan.

THE Princes once legitimized, the King set his heart on having them at Saint-Germain, in the sight and knowledge of the whole world. So the Governess, with her pupils, came to live in the Palace. It was all very fine to say the children had been legitimized: this did not alter the fact that their Governess, who lived in Madame de Montespan's apartment, was none the less, though entirely against her own will, under that lady's personal authority.

But though the situation was a false one, the mind of the person who held it was, as Madame de Sévigné had said, a marvel of uprightness. Madame Scarron hardly gave a thought to the fact that history would call on her, some day, to render an account of her own conduct. She recognized no judge at all save the man to whom she had confided the direction of her life, the Abbé Gobelin, her confessor, who ordered all things connected with her with the minutest care—things outward and things inward, her very outlay, her charities, the garments she put on. The priest who thus expressed his opinion as to the smallest details, had conscientiously weighed the matter of Madame Scarron's presence at Court. If he refused to allow his penitent to go there, into whose hands would the bastards be given? The characteristics of accidental princes such as these constituted a well-known quantity; infected, as they already were, with ambition and with a pride that might well bring ruin with it, they were apt to inspire anxiety even in their very cradles. Madame de Maintenon's voluminous correspondence, which the Abbé Gobelin handed over, at a later day, to the Ladies of Saint-Cyr, who copied it faithfully into their great books, provides us with constantly recurring proof that the question of conscience was debated between the confessor and his penitent. "Be pleased," wrote Madame Scarron to the Abbé, on August 1, 1674, "to permit me to say that I do not understand the scruples you appear to feel about your two journeys to Versailles. If you think I may conscientiously remain there, it will be difficult for you to avoid coming there yourself from time to time. You surely must come to me where I am!"

"Conscientiously!" This makes it clear that the delicate problem had been decided by the secret tribunal which, as Madame Scarron desired, weighed every iota of her life and soul, as a jeweller weighs his gems. It was not logical, on the director's part, once he had come to Versailles, to allow himself to be hampered, at the first glance, by his horror of setting his foot in a place where, strictly speaking, sin reigned supreme. Behold this humble priest, plain-featured, with eyes that blinked behind his spectacles, and a threadbare cassock, arriving most unwillingly (for come he did) in a shabby coach, at Saint-Germain or Versailles. He has served as a cavalry officer, he knows what society is, he understands the meaning of everything he sees. Horror of what the world really is has driven him to immure his existence in the priestly life, and the theological studies which have earned him the degree of a Doctor of the Sorbonne. Sadly he mounts the steps of a palace polluted by adultery!

When he had first begun to weigh this business of Madame Scarron's conscience it had been a comparatively small matter. At the Hôtel d'Albret his penitent had only displayed too much wit! But the problem has grown disturbing now, and it falls on him to solve it. He need only say one word, and the King will lose the services of the "godly woman." The bastards, fast growing up, will be made over to a Governess whose character will be more complaisant. After a careful study of the whole matter, he has come to the conclusion that he does not choose that Madame Scarron should abandon her undertaking. That her mind was disturbed we clearly perceive, in her daily outpourings to her confessor. On March 2, 1674, she writes: "I do not know how long I shall be here, but I am determined, since it is your desire, to strive to acquire a profound indifference to all places and every sort of life I may be destined to live, to detach myself from everything that might disturb my peace, and seek after God in everything I do. . . . You will be pleased to remember that it is your wish that I should remain at Court, and that I shall leave it the moment you desire me so to do."

At every turn we see her trembling, stopping short, begging for leave to retrace her steps. Now the legitimized princes are at Court, and in Madame de Montespan's apartment, she would fain have her own liberty, but she would not have it forgotten that the King has promised a reward. The King has said something about a sum of 100,000 francs: let His Majesty bestow it on her, and she will retire forthwith. The purchase of a landed property, that is the old dream of her childish days! Memories of Mursay, the thought of the life of busy work and freedom that will be hers on a soil into which she will strike fresh roots! Months roll by. She writes to her director, in July 1674: "The days pass in a slavery that prevents one from doing what one fain would do. I am still sad enough, and things are taking a turn that does not suit me. I have not sufficient self-command to enable me not to suffer from it, but I am willing to suffer, and I have made some progress, for I feel no more impatience, and I only feel suffering. Yesterday I made my devotions. . . . I made my confession to a man who could not hear me, and assured me I had not told him of a single sin: I am certain you would have judged me differently. Here is the report I owe you of my spiritual concerns. Let us pass to temporal matters: I have an immense longing to buy a landed property!"

Here we have the downright truth, without the smallest evasion. Her longing is to abstain from personal sin, to have no share in that of any other person, and to possess a landed property of her own. Monsieur de Montchevreuil, the old friend of her younger days, exerts himself on her behalf. Madame de Richelieu pleads with Madame de Montespan. Then Madame Scarron's friends plan a marriage for her with a certain Duke, but she considers him a tolerably uncivil personage, and a very rascally fellow into the bargain. "This marriage," she says, "will not be carried through; it would be a source of difficulties and annoyances which it would be very imprudent to incur. I have enough of those already in a situation which is singular, and envied by every one about me, without going to look for more in a state that brings misfortune on three parts of the human race." And again she writes: "It is a very vexatious thing to remain in so disagreeable a position. I must be a slave indeed to custom, not to dare to strike out a line of conduct that would bring me a quiet mind!" And she implores her director, since he has scruples of his own as to his journeys to Versailles, to understand that she has her scruples too. But the hands that hold her are strong hands, and direct her according to a settled purpose. In the month of July she writes: "For seven months past I have been thinking of the same thing. As I always speak sincerely to you, I will not tell you that I desire to leave the place where I now am in order that I may serve God better—I believe I can work out my own salvation here or elsewhere—but I can see nothing that forbids us to consider our own repose, and our escape from a situation that is a perpetual source of disturbance to us. I have explained myself very ill if you have understood that I think of becoming a nun; I am too old to change my condition, and according to what my fortune may be, I shall consider how to establish myself in one that shall be full of tranquillity. . . . I am wearing out my health in sorrow and in night-watches; I am pining away visibly, and I have most melancholy vapours."

When her scruples were appeased, she turned to other arguments. The King disliked her—she knew it. And then, ever since the Governess had been obliged to live in the lodging of the mistress, the disagreements between the mother and herself had been perpetual. Madame Scarron thought the children were improperly fed, she declined to share her authority with so capricious a parent. She held her own with the mistress; it became necessary, at last, to send Louvois to play the arbiter. "We had a tolerably passionate conversation (with Madame de Montespan)," writes Madame Scarron to her confidante, "yet very civil on both sides. After that, I went to Mass, and came back to dine with the King. Monsieur de Louvois was given an account of what was happening, and in the evening he was sent to me, to bring me to reason. He seemed to understand mine, and I explained it to him, perhaps with too much sincerity: you know I am not able to speak in any other fashion. The final conclusion was that I should spend a certain time yet in an honest attempt at reconciliation. I promised what he asked, and Madame de Montespan and I are to talk together this morning; it will be done, on my part, with great gentleness. Notwithstanding this, I remain firm in my decision to leave them at the end of the year."

Everybody then, even Louvois, was conspiring, for various reasons, to induce her to remain at Court. Though the King may not yet feel any liking for the *bel esprit*, she at all events inspires him with esteem and confidence. It is the director, at this particular moment, who appears to weaken, and permit his penitent to seek her freedom. The 100,000 francs are on their way, the money definitely promised: friends are looking about for the landed property, they are hard at work, and the Governess writes: "I spend hours that seem like moments when I let my imagination build castles in Spain, and make more or less sweeping reductions according to the condition in which my business affairs are likely to be. Yet be not alarmed! I never build any from which you are absent, and never dream of slipping out of your hands. I am growing the most self-interested creature in the world, my one thought is how I may increase my riches, but not without some scruple on the score of honesty, and it hurts me to press people to bestow favours on me, when I think that I only do it so that I may leave them!" To leave them, even as a servant leaves a troublesome master—again and again the word comes back!

Yet she stayed on, impatiently waiting for the gift, the property, the fortune. Her differences with Madame de Montespan alternated with the remonstrances she addressed to that lady; she had maintained her ascendancy over the mistress, whose conscience would occasionally groan under the weight of her sin. In their softer hours, Madame Scarron would beseech the guilty woman to break off "her commerce." At Clagny, when the King was far away, they would walk up and down in the gardens of Armida, hedged with jessamine and tuberose, and alone together the two would argue, going to the very bottom of a state of things to which there never could be any issue save mutual loathing, a humiliating fall, or else a noble repentance. Madame de Montespan would weep, confess to a priest, go to communion; then all at once the wind would turn, and she would make her preparations to go back to the Court. "What, Madame!" the Governess would cry, "you have just been to communion, and you are preparing to cast yourself deliberately into a peril that is certain to be displeasing to God?"

And once back at Court, the mistress, conscious that she was insulting her Maker and drawing down earthly blame and notice on herself, grew bitter against the Governess, and complained of her to the King; and the King thought this *bel esprit* more tiresome than ever. "I cannot understand," writes Madame Scarron to her director, at this time, "why it should be God's will that I should suffer through Madame de Montespan! She could not fail to hate me for the opposition she always finds in me. She passes me off to the King as being anything she chooses to make me, and robs me of his esteem. I am therefore on the footing, in his eyes, of an oddity with whom he must deal cautiously. I dare not speak to him directly, for she would never forgive me if I did, and even if I were to speak to him (the King), all that I owe Madame de Montespan forbids my ever saying anything against her. Thus I can never apply any remedy to what I suffer. Meanwhile death is drawing nearer, and both you and I will feel a great regret for such forgetfulness of past days."

Not a letter of hers written during this year but exhales the same complaint, the same longing for freedom and retirement. Then the director tries to bind his penitent to him with still closer bonds. He has given her a book of blank pages; he begs her to write down on these pages all her thoughts, all her failures to keep her partial vow of obedience. These are what she calls her "accounts of conscience:" all her life long she is to keep them; henceforward the director's eye will note the most secret feelings of her heart, her inmost aspirations. She obeys. To possess a property, to have her freedom, to work out her salvation, these things were at this period her only dream, the rest was no more than an accident in her existence.

At last, in January 1675, the King fulfilled his promise. Madame Scarron was informed that a grant of 100,000 francs had been conferred upon her. A few days later, the King, sitting with the little Duc du Maine upon his knee, said something about the child's intelligence and good sense; the boy replied, "How could I not be sensible? I am brought up by a person who is all made of good sense!" And the King was so delighted that he seized the opportunity to double the amount of his gift.

Madame Scarron's friends were on the alert, they were already thinking of Maintenon for her. The purchase was quickly concluded. "Pray God to break my chains!" cried Madame Scarron then; but growing submissive at once, she adds, "You are master, as to the time!" Her master had his plans, and took his time. But now her lot in life was settled, she herself was less uneasy, more patient. It was all no more, now, than a question of waiting. The instrument of her liberty was there, her own country property, her house, her ponds, whereof she might say, at last, "My home!" and twelve thousand francs a year that they brought her in! On February 6, 1675, she paid her first visit to her promised land. She found a roomy country house at the end of a large village, a situation that pleased her well, "very much like that of Mursay." Her dreams had come true, and forthwith her pen began to fly over the paper—a letter to the Abbé. "I spent two days there, and without exaggeration, they seemed no more than a moment to me. . . . I am very much delighted, and I wish I was there." This is a genuinely happy tone. But she had more to tell: "It is true," she adds, "that the King has given me the name of Madame de Maintenon, and that I would do greater things to please him than bear the name of a property which he has bestowed on me."

The King, then, was beginning to show some attention to the *bel esprit*. A word from him had wiped out the blemish of that burlesque appellation. With all his accustomed grace, he had saluted the new *châtelaine* in the presence of his assembled Court, addressing her by the name of her new property, "Madame de Maintenon." There were sharp ears in that company, the words were caught; "Madame Scarron" was not mentioned again.

A few weeks after this change in the Governess's life had been accomplished, another, far more important, supervened. The Easter festival, so critical for guilty lovers, was at hand. The King was to make his public Communion in the Chapel of Saint-Germain. The confessors had lost all their confidence in the periodical exiles to Clagny. Madame de Montespan was uneasy: the fatal moment when payment must be made was returning upon her, regular as the planetary system—Easter was drawing near. At the close of Lent in that year of Our Lord 1675, in the Palace Chapel, before the King, before Madame de Montespan, seated just behind the monarch's chair, before the Queen and all the Royal Family, Bourdaloue boldly attacked the subject of the scandal: "How many conversions, Sire, would be brought about by your example? What a charm might it not work on certain disheartened sinners who have fallen back into despair, if they could say to themselves: Behold this man, whom we have seen in the same debauchery as our own, behold him now, converted, and submitting himself to God!"

There was the true word, the word none but the Church had ventured to pronounce, "debauchery!" That was what Madame de Sévigné called "the great Pan's thunderclap." The King, upright in his armchair, bareheaded, his hat upon his knees, never bowed his head. Behind him, his uneasy mistress, too, heard the humiliating word "debauchery." The Jesuit descended from the pulpit, and passed out of sight; but the bolt was shot. Day by day Bossuet made bold comments on the exhortation publicly directed to the King, while the Governess of the bastards did her utmost in private to plant seeds of repentance in Madame de Montespan's guilty heart. Within those palace walls good and bad angels strove, in open war, around the sinful pair.

The King made his Easter communion. He was departing to the Army in Flanders. He gave his promise to God and to the world that he "would not fall again into the sin of David." Madame de Montespan was forced to bow her head and go into retirement. Madame de Maintenon went with her, acted, so to speak, as the chaplain of her repentance. Often, of an evening, the Bishop of Condom would come, a grey muffler drawn over his nose, to visit the forsaken mistress, and exhort her to flee her own peril, and refrain from going back to the Court. Madame de Montespan shed many tears; obediently she read, with Madame de Maintenon, the portions of Scripture the Bishop indicated for her perusal, and Bossuet, to create a sense of tender agreement in the lovers' sacrifice, would send the King those very texts, watered with the tears of her he had cast off. With them he despatched the powerful and vehement missives whereby he strove to tear the weeds of sin out of the monarch's heart.

At that moment it might fairly have been believed that the days of riotous living were over and done with. In this matter, too, Madame de Montespan tasted fresh triumph. On her part the sacrifice had been voluntary, this was well known. "They parted," said Madame de Maintenon, "loving each other more than ever." Madame de Montespan spent three months at Clagny, reigning over her flower-beds, her menagerie, her peacocks, her pet birds. The Queen, who bore no malice, paid several visits to this Berenice.

But in July the King returned in triumph from the wars, and the sovereign who came riding in with his victorious standards, his train of prancing noblemen behind him, bore but faint resemblance to the penitent of the preceding Easter Day. The time of grace and repentance had gone by. The King had ceased to send messages to Bossuet. Louvois had stepped into the Bishop's place, and among his war despatches the King slipped letters bearing neither name nor address, and intended, so he wrote himself, "for the person with whom you are well acquainted:" and the "person with whom you are well acquainted" sent her replies to Colbert. Once more Madame de Montespan was to be seen preparing for her return to Saint-Germain. Bossuet understood. He travelled as far as Luzarches with the Dauphin, his pupil, to meet the King: silent, his face inscrutable, he attended the first Court circle held by the monarch after his return. The King realized Monseigneur de Condom's distress: "Say nothing to me, Sir," he said. "I have issued my orders; they will be carried out!"

Bossuet held his peace and retired. The victor had tasted the heady wine of glory; he was no longer in the humour to listen to Biblical reproaches. Madame de Maintenon followed the incidents of this court drama from afar, and through the discreet allusions of her correspondents. She had been the friend of Madame de Montespan's Lenten fast; that over, she retired to a distance with the Duc du Maine. The coaxing child—they called him "the pet"—was sickly, he had a limp: a fistula in his thigh refused to dry up. The physicians declared him full of scrofulous humours. It was settled that his Governess should take him to Barèges. A royal suite was appointed to attend the bastard's journey: his chaplain, his equerries, tutors, lackeys, physicians. "Everywhere," writes Madame de Maintenon to her brother, "we are received as though we were the King." At Blaye, the Duc de Saint-Simon, father of the memoir-writer, entertained them magnificently. At Bordeaux, trumpets, violins, and all the cannon of the Château-Trompette announced the child's coming to the populace. "We got into our coach," says Madame de Maintenon, "and a hundred more followed us. It took us more than an hour to go from the port to the house."

Madame de Maintenon sent the King direct news of this pompous reception. This we know thanks to a letter written by Pélisson from the camp at Latines. On the preceding night, so Pélisson tells us, while the King was undressing in his tent, he had spoken to his officers of the letter he had just received from the Governess; he had smiled with delight. Already an intimate understanding between Louis XIV and Madame de Maintenon was growing up over that childish head. Did she ever ask herself, as she sat spinning in the rustic house at Barèges, what consequences a rupture, such as the Church might yet procure between the King and Madame de Montespan, might have for herself? Did she see herself promoted to a semi-maternal dignity in connection with her sovereign's cherished son? Was she, after having been a wife in name only, to be a mother who really was no mother? In her lifetime it was her good fortune—it was to be her misfortune, as regards her memory—that the welfare of her own soul and of the King's, for both of which she strove so diligently, should have invariably coincided with her individual success, and that she should have presented, in her own person, a standing verification of her habitual saying, that "the best cleverness of all is a conduct above reproach!" Her correspondence reveals no sign of what her human reflections may have been. Her numerous letters to her brother show how truly she typified her times by the stern tenacity of her endeavour to reinstate her own family in its former state of splendour. Passing through Poitou, she studies its genealogy, makes peace with the Caumont d'Adde family; goes back to Mursay, sees her cousin Philippe, still a naval officer, still burning to serve the King. Sadly she gazes on the Protestant towers of Mursay. How she longs to bring them under the enchantment of conversion! Then, indeed, the sun of the royal favour would shine on Mursay! Her memory still keeps the perpetual wound of the downfall inflicted on her name in former days by the rebellion of certain of her kinsmen, and the dissolute life of others. Nothing can less resemble a humbly born intriguer than this well-born woman who has set herself to rebuild that which a hostile fate has overthrown. Concerning the second act of the royal love-affair she is absolutely silent. To the King she has reported the details of her mission; to the King she brings back the little Duke. The father's "transport of joy" is her reward. That night she sups with her old friend the Duchesse de Richelieu: some, says Madame de Sévigné, "kissing her hand, others her gown, and she laughing at them all," unless she is very much altered!

But no more; from that time forward, does she play the friendly part of "chaplain of repentance" to Madame de Montespan. She lost all her spirits, lived on dreams of freedom at Maintenon, could not comprehend wherefore her masters insisted on keeping her at Court. She had regarded her journey to Barèges with the lame boy as a crowning proof of her readiness to oblige them. She poured out her despondency in her letters to the Abbé Gobelin. There was open antagonism between her and Madame de Montespan from this time forward. Now she had triumphed over Bossuet, the mistress was arrogant in her dealings with everybody, set herself up like an idol to be incensed and adored. Architects and decorators displayed their works for her approval. When she travelled, Governors harangued her. She spent money like water. Madame de Maintenon, persecuted and oppressed, found life most difficult. One day, so Madame de Caylus tells us, the King came upon the two ladies, both looking very much excited. He enquired the reason of their disagreement. Calmly Madame de Maintenon replied, " If Your Majesty will come into this room, I shall have the honour of laying the reasons before you." The King listened to her complaints. The Governess considered the children badly fed; she was unable, while she was in their mother's power, to bring them up as she thought right. The King was reduced to pleading with her to be patient.

" God knows the bottom of my heart," writes Madame de Maintenon in 1677; " I hope He will break my chains ! " The mistress was growing irritable, disagreeable. The King had promised he would love her, but he had not promised to be faithful to her; the appearance, the proximity of younger beauties never failed to attract him. " There is an odour of fresh young bodies in the country of Quantova (Quantova, in Italian, for 'so long as it lasts')," wrote Madame de Sévigné; and for the mistress that meant outbreaks of violence, sudden fits of rage. The scare once over, she was more extravagant than ever, and harsher as well; her distrust of Madame de Maintenon, the wise virgin, and of the foolish virgins too, deepened from day to day.

Amidst all these sudden happenings, the Governess was filled with one unvarying thought—her own departure. Out of the modest income of twelve thousand francs her Maintenon property brings her in, she gives, advised by the Abbé Gobelin, a tenth, twelve hundred francs, to the poor. She never wears colours, the Abbé has forbidden them, and she only has gold or silver trimmings on her black gowns because Court etiquette demands them. " If I were once away from the Court," she says, " I would dress like a portress." Her dream is to get to Maintenon and reign there. She has already appointed a Canon, a parish priest, a curate, for the place; she has brought spinners and weavers out of Flanders to teach the girls of the locality to spin and weave. Here is the plan of existence she sets forth as that she would desire to follow, once she can retire from the Court. " I would like to rise at seven in the summer and at eight in winter, spend an hour at my prayers before I call my women, then dress, and during that time see tradesmen, workmen, or any persons with whom one may have business to do; once dressed, I would go to church and not come back till dinner time."

" I would reckon to go abroad two days in the week, either for my own enjoyment or to pay necessary visits; I would sup with some particular friend or friends of both sexes; I would always retire at ten o'clock, say prayers with my servants, undress, and go to bed at eleven o'clock."

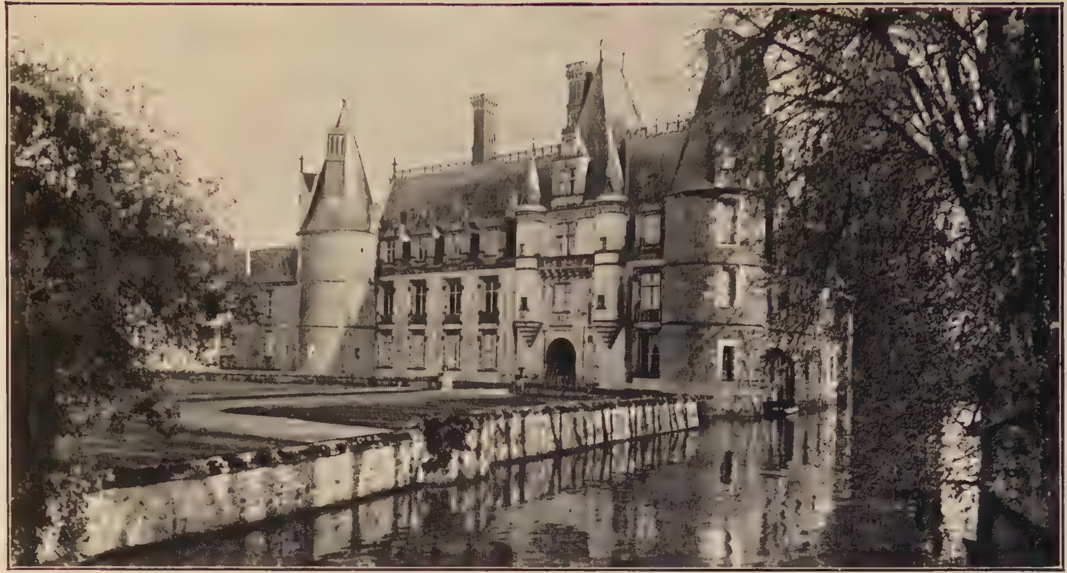
" I would devote the other three days of the week, one to visiting the poor of the parish, one to going to the Hôtel-Dieu, and the other to the prisoners, and I would spend my evenings alone, reading or working. I would never see anybody on the eves of the great festivals, nor on the eve of the days on which I make my communion, nor ever miss the services specially appointed for certain seasons; I would dress modestly, and never wear gold or silver, and I would give a tenth of my income to the poor. This is how I would begin, until my zeal led me to do more. . . . Consider," she says to the Abbé, " what you have to say about this plan. I have left a margin for whatever you may wish to add or suppress." The Abbé, no doubt, sent her an evasive answer, and put off the period of quiet and repose that seemed so " delicious " to her eyes, until a later date.

For, as a matter of fact, the " pious " party was anxious to keep her where she was. It clearly felt that the King's nature being what it was, sermons alone would not suffice to " break his chains," and that only a woman's magic power would ever undo what a woman's magic had wrought. From that time forward Madame de Maintenon was charged, and she realized it, with a sort of mission to the King. Since the day when she had dared to let the sovereign into the secret of her differences with Madame de Montespan she had no longer been in his eyes the " oddity," the *bel esprit*, he had once thought her, and though she still made plans for a life of retirement when she should have left the Court, that moment did not now seem so close upon her. In the pious party anxiety had reached its highest pitch. "Guelfs and Ghibellines," says Madame de Sévigné, "dwell together, but they are on the watch!" The King was neglecting Madame de Montespan, but only to follow fresh fancies. "Flies," Madame de Sévigné called them—brilliant flies that buzzed as they flew by. The King had been looking at Madame de Soubise. . . . Then it was Mademoiselle de Fontanges. . . . He raised his eyebrows when his mistress made sarcastic remarks: those eyes that swam in their proud tears seemed less lovely to him now. Feverishly the favourite sought to defy and baffle the fate that was to baffle her. She lost 100,000 *livres* at cards in a single evening. Colbert began to scold; it was the privy purse that paid. The King was growing weary of it all; the wheel of fortune was slipping from the fingers that had held King and Court under an incredible enchantment. Madame de Montespan was in despair, and the pious party too, when Mademoiselle de Fontanges, one of the Queen's Maids of Honour, appeared seated near the King in the Chapel at Saint-Germain, one day, in a gown of the same material as that worn by His Majesty, and both of them wearing blue ribbons! "I beg of you," wrote Madame de Maintenon, "to pray, and ask others to pray, for the King, who is on the brink of a great precipice." And while she sounded the alarm in the camp of those who sought the monarch's conversion, Madame de Montespan flew back, in a frenzy, to the lairs of the devil, and once more besought their denizens to give her incantations, philters, magic powders. When the mistress fell into these furies it was not against Madame de Maintenon that she would rage, it was against those "gadflies," those "sluts," that came flying round about the King. A tiresome preaching creature the Governess was, to be sure, but not a rival! The King's heart had never been the object of their disputes. In this particular matter Madame de Maintenon positively acted as Madame de Montespan's ally: in her anxiety to prevent Mademoiselle de Fontanges from becoming the King's mistress she had sent the Abbé Gobelin to his prayers, while the woman

Voisin, at Madame de Montespan's command, was pounding up her powders.

Then Mademoiselle de Fontanges was seen to droop and grow pale: she was over the edge of the precipice, poor girl; she knew it; she said, "I have been poisoned!" Such words were spoken or whispered by more than one dying person at that time. Here we are close upon the mystery of that *Affaire des Poisons* which turned the whole Court upside down in the year 1680. Madame de Montespan's contemporaries were unaware that her name had been mentioned. But not so the King: he knew it through La Reynie. Under cross-examination, Voisin declared that Madame de Montespan, finding her philters and her powders produced no effect on the King's heart, had caused poisoned stuffs and gloves to be introduced into the King's rooms, and those occupied by Mademoiselle de Fontanges. The King began by doubting the truth of this story, and then, above all, he held his peace: more than once his silence had been his strength. He read all the reports of the secret enquiry; through a phraseology designed on purpose to spare his mistress, he detected the fact that her threats—her wishes, at all events—had come within an ace of shortening his own existence. Could it be that he, the King, the regulator of the life of a whole people, had been at the mercy of a woman's fury, of the venal spite of a poisoner, of a powder? His pride, his sense of right, were wounded: the magic of the sorceress had marred the magic of his love. The religious party's opportunity had come. Not to it nor to its admonitions did the King owe his humiliation; that was his own doing. His faults would engender other faults, scandal would bring more scandal!

The death of Mademoiselle de Fontanges, the Affair of the Poisons . . . these were the final thunderbolts of the great god Pan. On the brink of the precipice, the King, silent, dismayed, cast a grave glance into the abyss before him, and withdrew himself into his own thoughts. Certain it is that this state of things brought benefit to Madame de Maintenon. Her chains were broken, and otherwise than



[Photo: Neurdin.

Maintenon Castle

in the manner she had foreseen. The King began to draw closer to the "oddity." She had always spoken her mind, she had lectured Madame de Montespan and Mademoiselle de Fontanges, too. The King himself had listened to her remonstrances. Did she not boldly say to him, one day, "What would you say, Sire, if one of your musketeers were to take his friend's wife?" The King showed he bore her no grudge. He was justifying those who, when he had first spoken Madame de Maintenon's name, had whispered "Madame de Maintenaint!" But when people accuse the Governess of ingratitude towards her "benefactress," of having played, in the background, the game of a rival, open or hidden, who seeks to usurp another's place, are they quite just? Do they really see clearly? Do they not fall into the error of those who judge a drama according to its conclusion, as we know it, but which the actors in it did not know? The drama we have before us here is not between Madame de Maintenon and Madame de Montespan, it is between Madame de Montespan and the "flies" that buzz about the Court. Madame de Maintenon is the censor, who brings the most unyielding of all possible resistances to every argument of passion—the resistance of a total lack of comprehension. She lived a thousand miles removed from anything like love. Mademoiselle de Fontanges retorted one day, to some remark of hers, "But, Madame, you talk of ridding yourself of a passion as if it were the same thing as taking off one's shift!" It is just possible that she may have thought those particular passions were fraught with vanity rather than with love!

With the Queen there was not, there could not be, any competition: with the flies that buzzed around there was no rivalry. If she sought, even then, to capture the royal will, she did it in "the good cause," and in full agreement with the Queen and with her saintly friends. She had set her foot, in the sight of all men, on the broad path to which she hoped to see the King, with his sense of uprightness, return one day—after the long wanderings that had brought him to sorrow and humiliation. If there was calculation of any sort connected with her expectations, it was not the calculation of a self-interested person, bent on appropriating the good things extorted from another. In her game the stake was not the King's heart, but the King's salvation. What was the general opinion of her, and of the part she played at Court? The King was clearly showing that she was his foremost, or perhaps his second friend. She carried on arguments with him in conversations that, so far, were somewhat formal and infrequent. It was not Madame de Maintenon, it was the Queen who was winning the rubber at last; and well did Marie-Thérèse know to whom gratitude was due when she gave Madame de Maintenon that signal mark of her favour—one which drew all men's eyes—her own portrait enriched with diamonds. Madame de Montespan, on the other hand, had never been on such good terms with her so-called rival since the King had turned his eyes away from herself. It was Madame de Maintenon who conducted the humbled woman to Maintenon, where she lay in with the little Comte de Toulouse—the last pledge of a worn-out passion. This time the great black eyes held no terrors for Madame de Montespan. They were all gentleness and kindness. In all the chatterings and anecdotes and correspondence of that period, we do not find one word that would lead us to take Madame de Maintenon's life to be a contradiction of the mission she had undertaken. Hers is the sensible head that has grasped things clearly: the most that is said of her is to wonder whether she is not a trifle proud of the fact. There are many people still alive who have known Madame Scarron as the unfailingly amiable guest of the d'Albret and Richelieu households. Villarceaux is an habitual frequenter of the Court, the Duchesse de Richelieu is settled there altogether, Ninon still presides over her *salon* in Paris, and the current news there is of the most amusing kind. Not a word do we hear. The false position is reaching a logical solution, for the depths of its holder's heart, and the direction of her mind, are both essentially true. The times are being accomplished; the King looks on the bitter dregs of his own passion, he gazes into the pit of his own errors: passionate, proud, selfish—these he may be, but not perverted! Suddenly he finds himself alone. On the brink of the abyss, Madame de Maintenon, passionless, lucid-minded, imbued with the doctrines of the Church, in league with its doctors, and prompted by them, holds him back.

CHAPTER VI

TRIUMPH—THE MARRIAGE

The King attracted by Madame de Maintenon—Her ideas—Her attitude—Madame de Maintenon appointed Lady of the Bedchamber to the Dauphine—The Queen's death—The King's marriage—Its date—Its reasons—Madame de Maintenon's feelings.

Her hour—the outcome of the natural and invariable course of events—was soon to come: the false position was clearing up of itself.

What really settled this woman's fate was the fact that she belonged, with all the strength of her being, and by a secret vow, as it were, to a living and spiritual organization, the members of which were all passionately intent on the realization of one great end, the establishment of moral order, labouring to that end, working for it as it worked for them, and doing all this openly, not secretly. Her hour was soon to come, because just at that moment the dial of the King's life bore all those signs that summon every man, and more especially a King, to realize the responsibility of his example and the weight of his errors. The King was forty-two. The sophistry of his pride had led him to live as though morals and the poll-tax had been obligations of the same order, and both of them invented for his subjects only. He was aware of the value of moral behaviour. He desired to see good conduct, and a great many marriages, in his kingdom. He exempted all poor men, fathers of large families, from the tax. The religious principles his mother had taught him had undergone no change. He honestly recognized the fact that his own errors had brought about the degradation attending the miserable business of the poisons. They had left him filled with suspicion and disgust. It was all very well to impose silence on those about him: he read his humiliation in the eyes of those who had warned him. And further, a thing was happening to the King which happens to men in humbler stations: his family was growing up around him. His son the Dauphin was married, and it would be necessary, in future, to reckon with the young couple's presence in the Palace of Saint-Germain. The Dauphine, a daughter of the Catholic house of Bavaria, had brought with her to the French Court a gravity of demeanour and devoutness of spirit that were hardly surpassed by those of Marie-Thérèse herself. The courtiers who praised her serious grace glossed over her lack of beauty in polite and roundabout language. The plain-featured princess proved her good sense, at all events, by her preference for a quiet life, for music, literature, and conversation; and the King, who wished to please her, was fain to conform his own habits to the immemorial customs of a family existence. A most courteous father-in-law he made. It was not for the Head of a Royal Family to feed the tittle-tattle of the day with tales of his love affairs. With his innate good sense and perfect taste he realized that fact, and further, that the misconduct of a father-in-law and a grandfather would provide an anything but elegant exhibition.

The Queen, on her part, was content that bygones should be bygones. She chose Madame de Montespan to be the Superintendent of her Household, and thus let it be known that the time for forgetfulness had arrived. There was no scandal, no dismissal of a favourite, no threat of a rival. Such was the position when, just as the German Princess made her first appearance, the Court took up its winter quarters. In selecting his daughter-in-law's Household, the King had been careful to choose ladies of irreproachable reputation. The Maréchale de Rochefort was her Lady of Honour, the Duchesse de Richelieu her first Lady of the Bedchamber; Madame de Maintenon, retiring modestly behind the high-born friend of her early days, had begged she herself might have the second place. The Duc du Maine passed into the care of Madame de Maintenon's friend, the worthy Marquis de Montchevreuil. It was clear that in the group of ladies chosen to mould the Dauphine's habits, the one most specially relied on was Madame de Maintenon.

The Duchesse de Richelieu, conscious of the fact, was none too pleased to note that she owed her own foremost place to the influence and tact of the modest *protégée* of former days. Madame de Maintenon made no difficulties, she slipped behind Madame de Richelieu's *tabouret*; everybody wore plain black gowns without gold trimmings; gravity, simplicity, reigned supreme; the ladies read the Italian poets; they made much of Racine; at their evening gatherings, Molière's genial laugh was often heard; in the Chapel they listened to Monseigneur de Condom, who had ceased to chide, and soared freely, now, in eloquent teachings of the highest order. Then it was that Madame de Maintenon wrote to the Abbé Gobelin, "I shall probably find it impossible to consider the idea of my own retirement at any early date." She is in her element, she is happy. "I am well in health, I am content—too much so for my own salvation, for I do not know what cross I have to bear!" She still saw Madame de Montespan, but their duties were performed apart. There were no differences between them now, and wherever they happened to meet—so Madame de Caylus tells us—they talked so freely and in so friendly a fashion, to all appearances, that any one not informed about the Court intrigues would have believed them the best friends in the world. Very sensibly, Madame de Montespan made the best of her own disgrace. Her new office satisfied her vanity; she had purchased it with a sum of 200,000 crowns, given her by the King. "Everything here is very peaceful," she writes; "the King never comes into my room except after Mass and after supper: it is much better to see each other seldom and in kindness, than very often and with difficulties between us." Queen Marie-Thérèse, for her part, had never learnt to be a Frenchwoman; she lived shut up with her Spanish serving-woman and her Spanish confessor, and permitted this last to direct her on a path more suited, so Madame de Maintenon would affirm, to a Carmelite nun than to a Queen. She spent a peaceful existence, and thanked God for that it had pleased Him to bring about the fall of the King's favourites, but she remained a timid creature, terrified whenever she was in the King's society, and would beg Madame de Maintenon to hold her hand when she had to enter the great Cabinet where the King sat at business, to ask him some favour. Madame de Maintenon would take the little fluttering hand in hers, and the door once reached, she would fall back. Everybody understood, everybody knew whence came the breath of wisdom that passed, peace-laden, over the Court. The foreign ambassadors mentioned the new influence. They found it hard to believe that the somewhat portly though still good-looking lady in a black gown, who habitually stood behind Madame de Richelieu's tabouret in the Dauphine's apartment, was " the machine that drives the whole thing." But Pope Innocent XII made no mistake about the matter, and—here was a favour even more astonishing than the Queen's gift of her portrait framed in diamonds—sent the Lady of the Bedchamber a brief written with his own hand, together with the relics of a holy martyr. So his ambassadors must have kept him informed as to the shifting of the wind. " I am too much glorified by this world on account of certain good intentions which I owe to God ! " wrote the Lady of the Bedchamber.

And the more evident her success as a woman devoted to the cause of order, and a handmaid of the Church, became, the more did she feel herself bound in the sight of God to lead a life that was already mystic in its religious austerity. Nothing but the most absolute disinterestedness and purity of intention could justify so manifest a favour either in her own eyes or those of her confessor. The Abbé Gobelin now increases the amount of the alms he desires her to distribute. Save at Maintenon, where she still gives in her own name, she hands her tithe over to him, and he disposes of the money. Part of her salary as Lady of the Bedchamber goes to pay the dowries of unprovided girls, when they enter the conventual life. " I enabled Mademoiselle de Montchevreuil to become a nun," she writes, " and I have another for whose board I pay. . . . I send you the memorandum of my charities, that you may judge whether they are well applied." Let us listen to her as she accuses herself of her sins of omission to the severe director of her existence, in her report of the occupations of her day. "My days are tolerably regular, at present, and very solitary. I pray for a moment when I leave my bed; I attend two Masses on days of obligation and one on working days. I say my office every day, and read some good book; I pray to God when I go to bed, and when I wake up in the night I say *Laudate* and a *Gloria Patri*. I often think of God in the daytime, I offer up my actions to Him, I pray Him to take me away from this place if I am not working out my salvation here, and moreover, I do not know what my own sins are! I have a moral nature and good inclinations, thanks to which I do but little harm. I have a desire to please and to be loved which puts me on my guard against my passions. Thus I hardly ever have to reproach myself as to my actions, but about very human motives: a great vanity, a great deal of frivolity and indolence, a great freedom in my thoughts and judgments, and a constraint in my words which is founded on nothing but human prudence. This is very much my condition. Order the remedy you may think the most appropriate to it."

There we have her genuine self: no portrait could possibly be more life-like. Her lucid mind has judged unerringly. Her feminine pride is not completely strangled yet. The sensation that an influence radiates from her person and acts on those around her fills her with delight. By degrees, the Governess of the Bastards governs the royal family, and the King himself. "Never," says the Queen, "has the King been so affectionate to me as since he has listened to her!" On every side she met smiling faces, grateful glances. Daily, in the Dauphine's apartment, the King, his dinner over, manifests his enjoyment of the Lady of the Bedchamber's conversation, and not content with meeting her in his daughter-in-law's rooms, sends for her to his own, there to continue talk which "grew perpetually in length and charm." No secrecy about all this: the Marquis de Montchevreuil comes to fetch her, and attends her back again, "in the face of the universe!" Madame de Grignan hears of it down in Provence. Sometimes the King's daughter-in-law will come in to pay him a visit—not a very long one. She finds the two seated each in a great chair, and when she departs they take up the thread of their discourse once more. "My friend (Madame de Coulanges) writes me," says the Marquise, "that nobody addresses the lady, nowadays, otherwise than with respect and awe, and that the Ministers pay her the court other folks pay them."

The rapid rise of so humble a star must necessarily have caused many a storm to rage. Many persons would have preferred the profitable ascendancy of a mistress, forced, from day to day, to purchase the toleration of those about her. Now there were no profits to be made, and the grumblers were driven, not only by the external evidences of the King's respect, but also by the assent of their own reason, to confess that the new influence to which the monarch appeared to bow was a healthy one, that it was making him the true Head of his family, that, in fine, and in the real acceptation of the word, he was becoming "the King." They found solace in secret jeers and treacherous evil speaking. The courtiers in the royal antechambers took delight in recalling the days when Françoise d'Aubigné, with the stain of her father's dishonour upon her, humbled by poverty and by her marriage to the buffoon, had so narrowly escaped seeing her name and her own family sink into disgrace. Madame de Sévigné wrote to her daughter, "Did she believe the opening volume of her story had remained unknown? And unless it was told in malice, what harm can that have done her?"

Madame de Sévigné, we may be sure, was in no ignorance as to that earliest volume of her friend's existence; but she must have been innocent indeed, or too utterly simple-minded a friend, if she supposed that any but spiteful fingers would have opened it at Court. The Mortemart family, in all its pride of name and lineage, and the unsullied purity of its noble blood, snatched at the rare opportunity of turning over, for the benefit of its devoted adherents, the records of a life already well known to its own members. If ever there had been a genuine stain upon that life, or any possibility of stirring alarm in the camp of the godly in connection with the past existence of the woman now playing her tiresome and virtuous part upon the Versailles stage, we may be sure the book would have been left wide open at the very page that revealed a blot so many would have been overjoyed to welcome.

Madame de Maintenon, no doubt, perceived something of these sneers. Stainless her life had been, but there were shadows on it. Her past had left her with a conscience at peace, but it still held hurts to her pride—what she herself was wont to call " my infatuation for my house ! "

Even now she was not thoroughly released. Her brother Charles was still to the fore, conceited, needy, more and more eager to draw close to her as he saw her means increase. All through the years of Madame Scarron's obscurity he had lived on the windfalls of a fighting life. He had been reprimanded by Louvois for the manner in which he had fleeced the inhabitants of some little town of which he had been the so-called " Governor." He had presented his sister with a natural son of his own, called Charlot. The child was being brought up at Maintenon, between the Canon and the parish priest. Charles d'Aubigné was now bent on obtaining a pension. He kept putting himself forward, a perpetual weight upon his sister, who dreaded the burden of his presence, his indiscreet sayings, his debts. After having spent a world of time seeking a wife amongst a variety of rich heiresses, he followed a sudden fancy, one fine day, and married, without a word to his sister, a little girl of the middle class, Geneviève Piètre, a blooming ignorant child, only fifteen years old. Forthwith the austere sister-in-law took the young wife under her wing, hired, with the newly married couple, a part of the Hôtel du Maine, paying half the rent so as to secure herself a voice in the expenditure of the establishment, and supplied them with advice, always prudent, and very often stern, in no niggard fashion. She realized herself to be full of prejudice against the common little creature, so " ill-nourished, and talking like a market-woman, stuffed with affectations, making faces and giggling about everything." Between two of her conversations with the King, she sent her directions for the household budget. "Your outlay," she wrote, "should not exceed 100 *livres* a week, 500 a month. You see, I reckon liberally, for 100 *livres* a week would only be 400 for a month; but when you add the cost of the laundry, your pitch torches, salt, vinegar, verjuice, spices, and small trifling purchases, it will quite come to that. I reckon four *sous* for the wine you will give your four lackeys and your two coachmen, and if you have wine of your own in the cellar it will not cost you three. I put down six for your footman, and twenty for yourselves, though you do not drink the value of three, but I have made the worst of everything. I reckon one pound of candles a day, there will be eight of them, one for the antechamber, one for your women, one for the kitchen. I reckon thirty *sous* for fruit. Sugar only costs eleven *sous* for a pound, and you only need a quarter of a pound to make a *compote.* I calculate for two joints of roasting meat, one of which will be saved of a morning, when the master of the house dines abroad, and one of an evening when the mistress is not at home for supper, but on the other hand I have forgotten to reckon for a boiled fowl for the soup. If you look into this carefully you will perceive that we understand how to keep house." She ruled this d'Aubigné household, theoretically and practically, as she ruled everything else, by her fearlessness, the freedom with which she spoke her mind. "As I hope we may live together for some time," she wrote her brother, "pray teach Madame d'Aubigné and her women to know me: that is to say, that while I lend everything with pleasure, I do not expect to find anything spoilt or broken, and that I have given Nanon orders to make a careful list of every single thing, from the bed with velvet hangings to the kitchen pot-hanger." And she closes her letter by saying, "I shall be delighted if you will write to me in as detailed a manner!"

Thus, with lavish expenditure of advice, she does her sisterly duty by a somewhat ridiculous young couple, and once the main part has been achieved, her brother provided with a governorship and a pension of 18000 francs, her little sister-in-law tolerably cured of her common ways, this family undertaking is accomplished, and the indefatigable labourer falls to work upon another.

There is a soft spot in her heart, her memories of Mursay, the Huguenot castle within which the best branch of her family has intrenched itself against the wiles of the Court. Her cousin Philippe de Villette, an officer in the Navy, still lives on unemployed, in that state of semi-disgrace to which the monarch systematically condemns all his Protestant subjects. Yet Philippe is no fierce Huguenot, he has married a Catholic, he is known as a loyal officer, he has been entrusted with missions to distant quarters of the world. Madame de Maintenon does her best to entangle this grandson of Agrippa's in the toils of her captivating sway. When she writes letters to the sailor whom she does not yet despair of leading back into the great fold of the Catholic Faith, words that are gracious and almost caressing flow from her pen. Let him at all events confide his son, young Mursay, to her care; the Huguenot youth will thus be enabled to enter upon life through the best door of all, that of the Palace of Versailles; his aunt will watch over his education, and will contrive to set him on the road on which the King is in a position to distinguish his true servants. The child will be brought up as a nobleman, and once grown to man's estate, will choose between the religion of those who once were rebels and that of the faithful believers who serve the King. The convert-maker had failed to win over the father, at least she would have the son. Philippe de Villette yielded, his son underwent the great temptation. A word of abjuration was secretly, privately spoken, in the church of Versailles, and all was done. With a swift and kindly smile the King made his young servant aware of the pleasure with which he had seen him enter the ranks of the faithful. Then, without delay, another cousin was summoned, Monsieur de Saint-Hermine. Young Caumont d'Adde, grandson of Jeanne de Cardilhac's ferocious enemies, comes to pronounce the same brief formula in secret, scarce above his breath. It is a delight to Madame de

Maintenon to see this little phalanx of converted relatives grouped around her. She brings more charm, more affection to this work than to her management of her brother's household; to govern, to enlarge the scope of action, moral or religious, there lies her real vocation. From the most august of them all, the King, to the least important, the cousin from the provinces, not one escapes it. Then the nieces: Mesdemoiselles de Saint-Hermine join their brother, and at last Mademoiselle de Mursay, the youngest of them all, comes in her turn. "I shall not lose one of them!" wrote Madame de Maintenon. She spun her webs, and caught the Huguenot flies in them. In Mademoiselle de Mursay's case there was a regular abduction. Madame de Maintenon travelled to Cognac, and sojourned in the house of a friend of her early days, the accomplice of her project. Madame de Villette came to pay a visit to her cousin, and that lady pleaded to have the child left with her for a day or two. Philippe de Villette was far away, at that moment, sailing the high seas. Madame de Maintenon took the little girl into her coach with her, and while the child's mother sat at Mursay, waiting for her daughter's return, that coach went speeding by short stages on its way to Versailles. "The child cried," writes Madame de Maintenon, "when she saw herself alone with me, but very soon she began to sing!" She, too, was taken to the King's Mass, and "I thought it so beautiful," the little girl, become Madame de Caylus, tells us at a later date, "that I promised I would become a Catholic, on condition that I might see a Mass like that one every day, and that I was never to be whipped!" Even so had Françoise d'Aubigné, long years before, become a convert, on condition she was not asked to believe her aunt, Agrippa's "the kind-hearted, the gentle," fated to be damned. "That," says Madame de Caylus, "was the only abjuration I ever made!" The convert-maker did her best to soften the cruel elements of her theft to the child's parents.

But there was no resistance in the parents' case, nor even any grudge. There could be no question of taking back a child that was growing up at Versailles, a child that was kissed and caressed by the Queen every day of its life! The aunt still nursed a hope that she might induce Monsieur de Villette himself to become a convert, and so be reunited to his children. She wrote him perpetual letters, pursuing him with her entreaties even across the seas on which the Huguenot officer was flying his sovereign's flag. "While you are at sea," she said, "you will not be suspected of having allowed yourself to be persuaded out of sheer compliance." The officer yielded at last. His cruise once over, he came to Versailles; like his children, on his knees in the parish church, he recited the brief form of words, and presently, when the King passed by, he too was greeted by his ruler's smile. The King halted in front of the officer, and complimented him. The convert made his obeisance and replied, "Sire, this is the first time in my life that I have not sought to please your Majesty!"

Then, truly, Madame de Maintenon was happy. She lived a life of comparative retirement in her various apartments at Saint-Germain, at Versailles, where the Court did not finally settle till 1684, at Fontainebleau, whither she went in attendance on her Princess, and at Marly. Very modestly she performed her duties as Lady of the Bedchamber. She it was who combed the Dauphine's beautiful hair every morning: this hair was the sole and only link between the Bavarian Princess and her Lady. Sophie of Bavaria, the royal springtide of her love once over, proved herself a woman of virtue, but, like the Queen, she was extremely bigoted. Wrapped, as she was always, in homesick longings, she spent her affections on her German serving-woman. Even as the Queen, shut up with her Molina, waited for the couriers from Spain, and said her prayers in Spanish, so did the Dauphine, with her Benzola, watch for the couriers from Bavaria and say her prayers in German. Madame, meanwhile, closeted with her nine dogs and sitting in her hunting-boots, wrote letters to the Palatinate, and read her Bible. At the Court balls, the Queen would yawn, the Dauphine dozed, the Dauphin slept outright. A mighty Nimrod, he hunted wolves all day, and sat mum at royal receptions, never betraying a desire for any company save that of his half-sister the daughter of La Vallière, already the widow of the Prince de Conti. The King realized the burden of terrible boredom that weighed on all the princes, but he still prescribed every operation of the Court pleasures as though they were an important affair of state, and ruled them with all a master's authority. Foreign ambassadors were dazzled by the unrivalled exhibition of splendour his Court presented, and described it in their despatches to their governments. The show once over, the Queen retired to mope in her own apartments. The King gathered his children about him. Now that he had settled down, this was where his inclination always led him. The Princesse de Conti, the Duc du Maine, Mademoiselle de Blois, Mademoiselle de Nantes, all flocked to his room. Madame de Montespan was admitted to these family gatherings. These children of the King's, who could be sulky enough on occasion, undisciplined, devoured with ambition, were kept in check by their knowledge of the fact that their existence as princes was only due to tolerance on the part of Court and nation. At these familiar evenings, Madame de Maintenon had her own special place—that of the former Governess, now become the most trusted counsellor of the august Head of the House.

The outburst of joy that greeted the birth of the Duc de Bourgogne in 1682 proved that though the populace was willing to tolerate the legitimized princes, it opened its arms with joyful enthusiasm to a genuine son of the House of France. The King shared this joy. He had been the father, by this time, of seventeen children. Ten of these were dead. But when he watched, with the Queen, beside the Dauphine, as she brought her firstborn child into the world, he felt a solemn revival of his regal paternity within him. The acclamations of the populace made the newly delivered mother start in her bed. The crowd poured into the Palace courtyards, into the very antechambers. The King, in his exultation, stretched out his hand for anybody to kiss. One of the royal servitors bit that hand, and apologizing afterwards for what he had done, he said, " Sire, if I had not bitten, your Majesty would never have noticed me ! "

Madame de Maintenon would have been justified, at that moment, in believing she had attained the ends the wise men had set before her. At any rate, she was entering, according to every probability, upon that phase of existence in which there is nothing left to do but await the normal development of the objects of our desire.

She was living as retired a life as was compatible with residence at a Court the master of which habitually masked the political undertakings on which he was engaged under a series of brilliant journeys, balls, and comedies. Her mysterious influence regulated the emotions of the royal heart. Mademoiselle de Mursay lived with her as her adopted child. A charming trait of her nature was that she always had children about her. She was training her niece up to play her part in life and in the great world. The child's professors came to her aunt's apartment to teach her Spanish, to play the lute, the harpsichord and the guitar, and to dance. Family memories were represented, in that quiet domestic existence, by Nanon, the faithful old waiting-woman. The aunt neglected nothing that might serve to adorn life; she was determined the little girl she had carried off, out of her passionate devotion to her own religion, should grow up both beautiful and gifted, worthy of that Mursay stock she herself held in kindliest remembrance. Her meals were served in her own apartments; except her niece nobody shared them.

When the Court moved hither and thither in attendance on the King, the little creature was handed over to the care of a nun, Madame de Brinon, who was then setting up a model school (the embryo of the future Saint-Cyr), and so spared the excitement of travel. To the child there seemed no great difference between her convent room and Madame de Maintenon's chamber. Mademoiselle de Mursay was the first Demoiselle de Saint-Cyr.

At Bourbon, at Fontainebleau, at Chambord, at Marly, Madame de Maintenon was still no more than a lady in attendance on the Court. Seats in the royal coaches, rooms in the houses prepared for pleasure sojourns, were still regulated by the hierarchy of rank. It was at Saint-Germain and at

Versailles that she was really at home, with the books of devotion given her by the Abbé Gobelin, her tapestry work, her spindle, her desk, and that recess hung with red damask to which the King so often betook himself for conversations the length of which set every one a-thinking. There was the real centre from which her influence radiated, there, impelled by her growing friendship with that shrewd Ursuline, Madame de Brinon, she began to dream over the first beginnings of Saint-Cyr. Everything combined to lead her to devote her existence to good works. The higher she rose in the King's favour, the stronger grew her feeling that serving the King, she served the Church and the cause of religion likewise, and that such service would never be thoroughly accomplished unless an increase of piety and an extension of her good works coresponded with it. Now that all her own kin had returned to the fold, she was pursuing the conversion of Huguenots outside her family. All the charm and gentleness at her command were applied to the task. " I am perpetually to be seen at Versailles," she says, " leading some Huguenot into a Church ! " This is the King's service as she understands it. " There will not be a Huguenot left in another twenty years," she writes, " if the King lives." If the King lives . . . she knew, then, that this was the King's own fervent dream ! Just about this time she founds, at Versailles, the first lay charity, the " *Association des Dames de la Charité*." It embodies one of her most cherished ideas, that of enrolling every lay woman in the army of good works. Every woman might, if she chose, learn to know the suffering of the poor, and apply a remedy : why should there be no method of helping the poor but that of giving alms, and then only convent alms? Madame de Maintenon had known Paris, she had led her friends into dark alleys and on to wretched staircases swarming with sickly children. An idea that we might almost describe as " modern " was taking shape; led by Madame de Maintenon, godly widows and dowagers were beginning to " go to the people," elaborating rules and statutes, setting up a certain order and discipline. Madame de Maintenon, sitting pencil in hand, surrounded by her disciples, looked like a sort of abbess. Crossing the anteroom, one day, Madame de Montespan called out in her bantering way, " One would think this was the sacristy of some church ! "

Thus Madame de Maintenon's life seemed to have definitely settled into its groove when the sudden occurrence of a quite unforeseen event changed the course of all the Versailles stars. In the month of July 1683 the King had been pleased to show himself, in the Queen's company, to his Alsatian subjects. Returned from this triumphant journey, the Queen fell ill. Four days later she was at the point of death; she took her farewell of life, as she had done all things, in gentleness. As the courtiers knelt in the Chapel at prayers for the Queen's health, they were startled by the King's sudden entrance, alone and unattended; hastily, at a word from him, six candlesticks were lifted from the altar, and the viaticum was borne before him to the Queen's apartment. Kneeling beside the dying woman's bed, he received the sacrament with her. Madame de Maintenon was in the room. When the Queen was dead, the King shed a few tears, and then withdrew. " This is the first sorrow she has caused me ! " he said. Madame de Maintenon, too, made as though she would retire to her own apartments, but Monsieur de la Rochefoucauld took her by the arm, and pushed her towards the King, saying, " This is not the time for you to leave the King alone, he needs you ! " She remained a moment only with the King, and returned at once to her own rooms, attended by Monsieur de Louvois.

" The King," says Madame de Caylus, " was more affected than afflicted." He mourned the Queen just as he would have mourned a good and holy Carmelite nun. In his coach, a few days afterwards, with the Dauphine and Madame de Maintenon, he was unable to restrain a fleeting smile, and gave it to be understood that he should feel grateful to the ladies if they would refrain from saddening his drives in the beautiful summer weather, and under the shade of those glorious trees, by wearing such funereal countenances and such overpowering weepers.

The very day after the Queen's death, Madame de Montespan was heard to declare " He must marry again ! " Her recollections of her royal lover warned her that unless he had a wife, the King would once more be at the mercy of his caprices. In the camp of the convert-makers, sorely disturbed by this widowhood, the alarm was just as deep, and the same wish openly expressed, " He must marry again ! " That merciless Court existence would hardly grant a few poor days in which to mourn the dead. Those were robust times, and to the men born in them physical strength and manly prowess in war and in the chase outweighed all matters of sentiment. Nature ruled the roast : the moralists knew it all too well, and feeling it the safest course, advised every widower to marry again. Confessors imperiously pressed re-marriage on their penitents. Bussy relates in his Genealogy that after his second widowhood it was his own uncle, the Grand Prior of France, who peremptorily desired him to find himself a third partner. Great sorrows were shortlived, undying regrets were most uncommon : the death of a wife was an unfortunate but a quite reparable accident ; marriage was honoured, re-marriage was honoured too. A man who lived in widowhood was living an unnatural life.

This view of the King's widowed condition was common to everybody at Court. In every one's eyes, the problem was immediate.

In what year, what month, at what moment, did the King make up his mind to marry again, quietly, like a private individual who had already presented the nation with an only too liberal supply of princes to support ? No document provides a sufficient answer to that question. The monarch's contemporaries were slow to realize the existence of any peculiar bond between him and the lady who lived the life of a hermit at Versailles. Voltaire, who took pains to find out, thought the marriage took place two years after the Queen's death. Madame de Caylus, who lived in close family intimacy with her aunt, never knew the date at all. Madame de Sévigné, from whom the marriage of Lauzun and the *Grande Mademoiselle* evoked exclamations of astonishment, and to whom the King's feelings were a subject of curiosity, never once, in the course of twelve whole years, mentions the fabulous marriage to her daughter. It is impossible, even by reading the whole of her correspondence through, to discover the remotest allusion to the matter. Yet the fact that the marriage did take place is certain; but the only proofs we possess are contained in correspondence of a later date—letters from the men who directed the King's conscience, and Madame de Maintenon's. They alone ventured to touch on a secret that was shared, nevertheless, by others; their duty forced them to refer to it.

But if the date of the marriage remains unknown, the same condition does not appear to have obtained with regard to the feelings that led the King to his decision, or to the influences that affected it.

His re-marriage was a necessity. Important influences and his own sense of the shame his insolent amours had brought into his immediate surroundings had sent him back to the Queen; his heart had had no say in that matter. And it was not at the moment when the poor Spanish lady, half a nun, had just passed out of life that he was likely to shut himself up in gloomy celibacy. The Père César, the Père de la Chaise, his close counsellors, who had witnessed his frailties with aching hearts, and had so often advised him on matters connected with his conscience, understood it all. His widowhood brought back the pressing danger of the mistress. From that point of view the disappearance of the wife was a calamity. Madame de Maintenon, too, took alarm, and begged the Abbé Gobelin for his assistance: "Pray," she said to him, "for the King; he needs it to enable him to endure a state of existence so contrary to his nature." In the secret councils of the Court, in those of the Altar, too, men's brains were busy. The King, meanwhile, took counsel with his own conscience, and considered the whole matter. Though the sovereign good taste which was his special gift led him to suppress every trace of an intimate existence the secret of which we would fain discover here, it is easy for us, all the same, to find our way into the recesses of that kingly but most human heart, and follow the thread of his meditations.

The King is left alone, in widowhood. Out of repentance, of disgust, he has put away his mistresses. This point is settled. But being a widower, he is exposed to temptation. Does he dream of one of those political unions decided at some cabinet council, with the eyes of all its members fixed upon a map? For that the time has gone by. The existence of a son, of two grandsons, ensures the future of the throne. The only political prospect that might offer any temptation to the Crown is that involved in their position as heirs of Marie-Thérèse. Thanks to the isolation, whether melancholy or simply unsociable, in which they have elected to live, and to their incapacity for reigning over so gay, so witty, so brilliant a Court, foreign princesses have done nothing, hitherto, to make themselves loved or regretted. Marriage, political and official, the advent of a second Queen, was neither useful or desirable; solitude was both a dreary and a perilous condition.

Did the King himself end by desiring to marry Madame de Maintenon? And if the idea of doing so was not solely his, who suggested it to him? The one thing we must put away is any thought of a romantic affection. If ever a marriage was based on sensible considerations it was this one. If it was accomplished suddenly, that was because the simplest logical conclusions pointed to the necessity for doing it secretly and quickly. Saint-Simon was allowing himself to be stupefied by that sort of ducal apoplexy of the mind from which he suffered when he wrote the words "History will not believe it!" History does believe it, and quite willingly; and, extraordinary as the marriage may appear to posterity, circumstances so evidently pointed to it at the time, that the monarch's contemporaries felt no indignation in connection with it. A matter of conscience, it partook of the private and mysterious character of such questions. Nobody knew anything about it, at first, and when it became known, people held their peace. Though the confessor may not have ventured directly to propose marriage, at those weekly conferences on the matters of the King's conscience, he no doubt suggested the idea, at all events. Those closest counsellors knew how to defend and foster the influence of the woman who had rendered such perfect service to the cause of order, in the King's mind, and if they did not name the individual, they led the King, at any rate, along paths where he was sure to find her, free from all worldly ties, devoted to good works, silent, trusty, known to him already, and valued by him. The King had taken pleasure in her intelligence, he had felt her healthy influence; the moral bond between them was already in existence; she had known everything, been informed of everything, she was the born confidante; she was French to the very marrow of her bones; the King had chosen her out from all her fellows to bear her share in a friendship already ratified by fruits which had won universal praise. And then, was she not the very stepmother for the bastards she had herself brought up, and who were now beginning to invade the Court? The King's Benjamin, the Duc du Maine, loved her, and she would say of him, "He is the weakness of my heart!" The bond with the monarch and his children was to be very easily formed. In this well-born woman, with her noble intelligence, the King had found his equal, and better than his equal. If he felt no love for her (and that is his own secret), he esteemed her and respected her, and she brought back the recent and precarious state of order death had just disturbed into his unexpected widowhood.

Further, the known character of the woman, the strictness of her religious life, were a guarantee that she (and only she) would observe the secrecy that was to be so religiously maintained. She would marry the King to be his one and only friend, but she would also, in a sense, espouse him for the Church. She renounced beforehand all the external signs of a greatness that was never to be made known. More than ever she was to live as a recluse. The silence she was asked to keep partook of the nature of a vow: she never broke that vow.

And she? What were her thoughts? her feelings? And why, after the Queen's death, while the Court was at Fontainebleau, did Madame de Caylus see her aunt in tears, and hear her complaining of depression? "I saw her so greatly perturbed in mind," she says, "that I have judged it, since, to have been caused by a violent uncertainty of her condition, her thoughts, her fears, her hopes; her heart was not free, in a word, and her mind extremely disturbed. To hide her various emotions, and justify the tears we saw her shed, she complained of vapours, and would go, she told us, to breathe in the forest, with Madame de Montchevreuil only; sometimes, indeed, she went there at unseasonable hours."

Those tears the child saw her aunt shed are the only indication that has reached us of the perplexities that troubled her. Concerning that deep mystery her letters speak no word. One only escaped her, to her closest friend, Madame de Brinon. They did not venture to write all they felt, but they used to say, "our angels communicate with each other!" Madame de Brinon, we may be sure, had made some allusion to a rumour of the fabulous marriage, for Madame de Maintenon writes: "There is nothing to answer regarding the matter of Louis and Françoise; all that is nonsense. I would only like to know wherefore she should not have wished it; for I never should have thought the exclusion in this business would have been on her part." Her letter bears the date of August 22, 1683. Thus, only three weeks after the Queen's death, Madame de Brinon had heard the rumour, and enquired what she was to say about it. "There is no answer," replied the person most interested in the matter. We may remark that Madame de Brinon did not think a union with Madame de Maintenon unworthy of the King; it was to Madame de Maintenon she ascribed the refusal. The faithful subject recalls her friend to a more correct sense of the difference in rank when she replies: "I never should have thought the exclusion would have been on her part!"

No! It was not on her part! And yet she wept, she went out early in the morning with Madame de Montchevreuil to conceal her depression and shake it off. She knew enough of Court life, she had pondered enough over the caprices, the jealousies, the intrigues, she had witnessed, to be able to gauge the nature of the slavery in which the dreaded bond must hold her. And this woman, a passionless woman, was not in love with the King. No woman falls in love with a man on whose actions she has been passing judgment for the past fifteen years; and with her usual clear-sightedness she judged him great, as a King, but fickle, as a man. She had known all his weakness and inconstancy. Neither by her age—she was eight and forty—nor by character was she the woman to forget, in an outburst of passion, all she had seen and heard. She knew right well that she would not be marrying the King, but the private individual, the affectionate but careless father of seventeen children, legitimate and bastard, the very man she herself had so often blamed and withstood. Even the rank to be attained was no temptation to her. Marriage, in such extraordinary circumstances—this marriage that Voltaire, like ourselves, called a " marriage of conscience "—would bring her nothing at all; its sole dignity resided in its mystery and sacrifice. Here was no question of stepping into the favourites' shoes and triumphing over them. She was to be neither an anointed queen nor a profane one. Once more it was her fate to enter on a false position. If the marriage was secret, was the King likely to keep so careful a watch upon himself that no sign would reveal the strange bond to prying eyes? And might not that bond become food for calumny, for fresh scandal, more hateful, more shameful than all its predecessors, the scandal caused by a virtuous woman?

If we desire what was unknown to any contemporary person, documentary proof of the marriage, we must seek it in the rough draft of a letter to the King, written some thirteen years after the event. It was found among the papers of Godet-des-Marais, Bishop of Chartres, and Madame de Maintenon's director. The Bishop expresses himself with a priestly freedom that sweeps all mystery and fiction out of private intercourse: " One of the signs of predestination, in the case of princes," he writes, " is when God preserves them to a ripe age, after having lifted them out of idolatry, pleasures, and sensuality: above all, when he inspires them with humility, with religious feeling, with the fear of His Judgements, and when, after he has tried them by various conflicts, He gives them a wise counsellor, and faithful and godly people to assist them. This, Sire, is what God has done for you. You have an excellent partner, full of discernment and of the spirit of God, whose tenderness, fidelity, and affection for you are unequalled. I will answer for it, Sire, that no one can love you more tenderly and more respectfully than she loves you. She will never deceive you, unless she is herself deceived. In all the matters I have had the honour of discussing with her, I have never known her declare herself on the wrong side. She is like Your Majesty: when the facts are laid before her, she unfailingly takes the part of wisdom and of justice. It appears very visibly, Sire, that Heaven has been pleased to give you a helper who is like unto yourself, in the midst of the crowd of self-seeking and deceitful men who pay you court; to grant you a wife who resembles the wise woman of the Scriptures, busy about the glory and the salvation of her husband, and good works of every kind."

Here we have the sacramental words "husband, wife," under the hand of the close confidant who had by that time replaced the Abbé Gobelin. It is as though we had been permitted to slip into the King's oratory at the very moment when the Archbishop of Paris was in the act of pronouncing them in the presence of those witnesses, every one of whom faithfully kept their vow of silence—the Confessor, the Père de la Chaise, the Marquis de Montchevreuil, and two others, whose duties were to make them the daily witnesses of the intimacy established by the legitimate bond, Bontemps, the King's valet, and good Nanon, the aged serving-woman, the ghost of the old Mursay days.

On September 26th, two months after the Queen's death, Madame de Maintenon wrote to the Abbé Gobelin, "I feel great regret about the last visit you paid me. The time was ill employed, and made you aware of a part of my uneasiness: that is over, apparently, at least, and I am in a peace of which I should have more pleasure in talking to you than of the disturbances that we communicated to you. . . . Farewell, Sir! Do not forget me before God, for I greatly need strength to make a good use of my happiness!"

If we must assign a date to the marriage, we may suppose it to have been settled between the day on which the penitent confides her troubles to her director and that on which she makes her appeal for strength to make a good use of her happiness. And it will be wise to conclude the period of betrothal to have been a short one. The King was not addicted to waiting. He was forty-five years of age at the time; he was taking up his winter quarters.

The only public mark of distinction, Voltaire tells us, that indicated Madame de Maintenon's elevation, was that she sat, at Mass, in one of the little gilded galleries or lanterns that seemed to have been constructed for the sole use of the King or Queen.

Did not she who had always withdrawn herself into the background, who had refused, after the death of the Duchesse de Richelieu, to be First Lady in Waiting to the Dauphine, feel some secret pride when she occupied that seat? At Court, she was nothing at all; her realm, henceforth, was to lie in the deep shadow. But to the wife's place in the Chapel of Versailles she felt she had a right; there, with a quiet conscience and a tranquil heart, she might kneel in the presence of her God.

CHAPTER VII

MADAME DE MAINTENON AND THE HUGUENOTS—THE REVOCATION OF THE EDICT OF NANTES

False position of Madame de Maintenon—What part did she play with regard to the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes?—Was this Revocation desired by the King's ministers?—By the doctors of the Church?—By public opinion?—Madame de Maintenon's sympathy with her former co-religionists.

AFTER all her disturbance of mind and unavailing hesitations over what was already written in the book of Fate, Madame de Maintenon had entered into peace at last. From this time forward we note a far greater serenity in the tone of her letters. No more peevish faultfinding with her brother, no more secret sighing over opposition at Court; she breathes all the gentleness of one who has laid down her fighting weapons. "Pray to God that I may make a good use of my happiness!" she had said. Her happiness taught her to smile. There is no apparent change in her life. Mademoiselle de Mursay still sits at her table; she is thinking about a marriage for her niece. "She will gain less advantage from my favour than she would have if I had been of a different turn of mind," writes the all too reasonable aunt, "but she will always make a better marriage than she would have naturally made." What interests her most is the action on external matters of an influence which her own marriage has rendered literally supreme. She has blossomed out into a lady devoted to good works, with a free hand that undertakes great things.

At Maintenon, first of all, where she organizes the work methodically. She is determined to be rid of the sight of the band of a hundred uncared-for brats, that yawn in summer, shiver in winter, and idle at all seasons, in the great courtyard of the Château. She tries to have them taught handicrafts: a far better plan than to allow them to depend on charity. Her Dutch weavers are now quite settled into the outbuildings of the house and in the village; they petition for a model laundry for their linen fabrics, and their request is granted; the parish priest has his school; a general hospital for the sick is founded. This is the fertilization of the "promised land." She goes to it herself, from time to time. It is a delight to her, when she comes out of church after early Mass, to see the clean and healthy-looking children that pull off their caps as she goes by; she delights, too, in the buzzing of the looms, and in the sight of the linen spread out to bleach in the sun on the meadows. Maintenon is the only place in the whole world in which she has ever been "at home." At that very same hour, it may be, Madame de Sévigné, too, is taking her morning walk, sniffing the cool air in her woods, and thinking of the friend of her bygone days. "Madame de Maintenon's position," she writes, "is unique: there never has been, never will be, anything like it." That was true; and the writer's own position was a very usual one: her daughter, her son, her country property, the growth of her trees, the calculation of her income, these make up the little universe of a tender-hearted and partial-minded being, who has been wise enough to confine her life within the limit of her love. All other things, to her, are but an entertaining spectacle, which feeds her taste for seeing, knowing, and relating.

What was left, in these days, of the daily intimacy of the two women who had once "enchanted" each other with their conversation? What did Madame de Sévigné think and know of this astounding volume of her old friend's life? Madame de Maintenon had ceased to give descriptions of the "horrible agitations" of a country with which she was now more than ever familiar. But Madame de Sévigné's astonishing respect for the King's secret would prove that there was still a mysterious understanding between the two ladies. Such loyalty only endures in the case of friends who continue to know and love each other. We need not look far for an explanation. A woman, a friend of the old days, and of the present time, still wheels and buzzes around the great figures at Versailles, watching their rising and their fall: this is Madame de Coulanges. She, we may be sure, knew all the secrets; through her they filtered, in the half light of confidential talk. We see her, passing on her way, thanks to Madame de Sévigné's letters, alert and full of merry quips; she lives on terms of intimacy with Madame de Maintenon, does her commissions, carries her messages from Versailles to Paris. Reading the letters carefully, we perceive that she conveys the manuscript of Bussy-Rabutin's Memoirs to Madame de Maintenon's hands, and that Madame de Maintenon reads them to the King. In Madame de Maintenon's immediate vicinity, Madame de Coulanges is always picking up scraps of information, and if a chance word should fall from the King's lips, swiftly it is sent flying to Paris, and thence to the country house beneath whose roof a culprit who has given his witty tongue too free a rein sits eating out his heart, pining for his return to favour, panting to attain the coveted dignity of *Maréchal de France.* "Bussy writes very well," says the King, and Bussy, greatly cheered, sends his respects to the King's reader, now become so august a lady. "The truth, too, must be told," he writes, "and the truth is that however high her fortunes may rise, they will always remain inferior to her virtue!" Here is a sentence certainly not written to be concealed, and the continuation of the manuscript memoirs shortly follows. Madame de Sévigné receives it, and has it conveyed to her unseen friend, who never speaks a word, nowadays, never writes a line, but manifests her existence all the same. Presently it is not only Bussy who "writes very well." In a packet despatched direct to Madame de Coulanges, that gentleman encloses certain letters from his brilliant cousin. This fact we learn from Madame de Sévigné herself, who has been informed of the treacherous proceeding. Such a clamour as she raises! What! That little thoughtless pen of hers that runs on hither and thither so blindly, making no claim to be taken seriously—its productions are to be shown to the King, to be read aloud to His Majesty! This, most certainly, is enough to silence that pen for ever! We will waste no more astonishment on the lady's loyalty and respect; let us rather cast our admiring glance on that little picture of domestic life—Madame de Maintenon reading Madame de Sévigné's letters, and Bussy's too, aloud to the King. "You believe," Bussy says, "that one of my best friends reads my letters with the King, and I believe it too, for I set the highest value on her intelligence, and on her heart." Thus things are sometimes known for certain, and at others, believed to be true. During the siege of Philipsburg, a little later, when the young Chevalier de Grignan's thigh is bruised by a spent ball, the incident is announced to Madame de Maintenon by the King himself: she was evidently regarded as the elderly friend, even the protectress, of the youthful warrior. And as a matter of fact, young Grignan, coming to Versailles to pay his duty to the King, is received by the person who, as a rule, receives nobody at all, and when she compliments him on his bruises, the Chevalier modestly replies, "It is nothing!" "Sir," answers his powerful protectress, "it is better than nothing!" "Better than nothing;" in other words, the King shall hear of it, or knows of it already. All this flies from Versailles to Paris, from Paris into Provence. Though Madame de Maintenon has ceased all personal intercourse with the friend of her earlier days, she still holds communication with her. At the performance of *Esther*, at Saint-Cyr, Madame de Maintenon finds means to whisper in the King's ear that Madame de Sévigné is present, that she has said a flattering word. Hardly more than a sentence is exchanged between the two old friends, but the King has smiled, he has spoken a word; the friend of the Rue de Vaugirard has been acknowledged; like a flash it came, and, Madame de Sévigné goes on, "a whirlwind swept her from me!"

A whirlwind? Let us rather say, a cloud. In proportion as Madame de Maintenon's fortunes rose higher and higher, she vanished out of her friends' sight, swallowed up in regal gloom. For this apparent prosperity, which has dazzled the generations that have come after hers, and incensed them, as it were, against an intruder, involved the infinite dreariness of a life of utter solitude. Once again she found herself in a false position: after having been married to Scarron and yet no wife, after having been the mother and yet not the mother of the bastard princes, and a convert-maker associated, in the world's eyes, with the scandal of the King's adulteries, behold her now, married to the King, yet not his Queen; shut up, though married, in a life like that of many a nun! Besides all this, she must still perform the duties of her office at Court. She continues to be the second Lady in attendance on the Dauphine, and combs the royal locks day after day. We shall yet see her Superioress of a religious community, and not a nun herself. "I shall be a riddle to everybody!" she would say. No! She was no riddle, and those who knew her best inspired her with that perfect union of her thoughts with the great end she pursued—to be, as it were, an obedient missionary to the King, to serve him, to direct his ways.

Moreover, for one who takes delight in "driving the machine," safely ensconced in her own room the while, she has a great reward. A huge field of action lies before her. The King, in her case, is like a Providence who blesses and facilitates all her undertakings. He gives her four thousand *livres* a month, all spent by her in charity, and in the privacy of their life they are meditating the foundation of Saint-Cyr. She is already making an attempt of the same nature at Noisy, and the various good works are being brought into co-ordination in her hands. She has great waggon-loads of flax conveyed to Noisy; the young girls in that house are taught to spin; a hundred and eighty-four spinning-wheels are turning, all at once. The thread is despatched to feed the looms at Maintenon. From the flax-grounds of Maintenon to the shady plantations of Saint-Cyr is something of a far cry, but in each case the path is one and the same: the reforming spirit in her indicates whither she must tend and how far go, and reconstructs everything it undertakes.

To the Abbé Gobelin she writes, "The only objects of piety I have in my room are those you have given me." Her only books are the Gospels, the Imitation, and the Old Testament. "In future," she writes, "I shall have no others." In a palace where luxury is carried to the utmost limit of extravagance, she has nothing of her own save her ante-chamber and her apartment. As far as the public knows, the King is no more to her than a constant visitor who goes before his supper to seek recreation, or to work with his minister, in the presence of a woman whose sobriety of mind has been well known in Versailles for the past fifteen years. People have grown accustomed to this, nobody is disturbed by it. Madame de Maintenon has brought neither relations nor hangers-on to Court with her; she fulfils her bare duty by her family, and then leaves it to accuse her of being an unkind relative. She considers she has done enough by converting her Huguenot cousins and having their children brought up in houses where they will be taught to serve the King. Anything beyond this would be unjust and dangerous favouritism. Mademoiselle de Mursay has had some experience of this, seeing her aunt has refused her niece's hand to the Duc de Boufflers, on the plea that the difference between the would-be bridegroom's rank and her own is too considerable, and has been content to accept the Comte de Caylus, a man of moderately noble birth. Her brother Charles d'Aubigné insists on coming to show off his provincial splendours at Versailles; he even ventures, with a smile and a side glance at the door of the cabinet through which the King has just passed, to whisper knowingly "the brother-in-law!" He is given his dismissal. This same brother, now Governor of Cognac, has an annual salary of thirty thousand francs; Maintenon is to be his inheritance, his daughter to be his heiress. That is enough, no more need be hoped from a favour that is strictly personal, and, as she says, "cannot be carried further."

Thanks to her great simplicity of taste and dress, Madame de Maintenon has long since taken all the heart out of the horde of cheats who had made their living out of the favourites. The only letters allowed to reach her hands are those of nuns and Bishops, begging alms or requesting information. With the Superioress of Noisy, Madame de Brinon, she keeps up a close and daily correspondence. No details, however minute, connected with this thrice-beloved institution can repel her. To set forth the regulations for the life and instruction of these young girls, for the very dress they are to wear, she draws up a memorandum worthy of a cabinet minister. And after she has said her prayers, of a morning, we find her reckoning up the modest supplies of honey and of linen cloth on which she may rely for the use of her children at Noisy. Helped by the enterprising Madame de Brinon, she will do something novel, she will escape from the " convent rut." The result of the royal favour is not to be laid out on the d'Aubigné relations, it is to be devoted to this first-selected group of girls, the " Enfants de Noisy." The King, she says, will found the house on a solid, even a magnificent footing: to bring up young girls to an ideal life of work and of simplicity, to surround them with nuns who can still look out with wide open eyes on life, and on the outer world, this, in good sooth, will be to " make a good use of her happiness." And these same nuns, too, she would fain see more attentive to the exercise of an evangelic virtue than to the practice of ceremonies dear to the pious: " but," she adds, " all the devout folk will rise up against me if I do not give them an Office to say, a prayer to repeat, fasts, and sins, and retreats ! " She summons missionaries and speaks her mind to them, fearlessly pointing out the dangers attending an educational establishment cut off from the outer world, in which young girls, not all of them intended for the cloister, were left without any weapon to protect them against life's pitfalls, save their own ignorance.

Thus the Reformer is busy at her work. We shall follow its progress, presently. Let us first look, in all fairness, into the question of what she does and what she does not do. Here the great question rises up before us; it is the very essence of the accusation history has brought against her: what part did she play in connection with the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes?

We have seen that her mind still turned towards the great hope, the conversion of the Huguenots. In this work her future allies are to be the royal power, the royal affection, and the royal treasury. She has retained her partiality for the Huguenots. Let us once more note the fact that in all her letters, filled as they are with strictures severe, and often bitter, on the superstitions she notes in convents, we never find one word of criticism of the Huguenots: there is no antagonism between her and them, quite the contrary. At a very late period, and when she has fully entered on her duties as a mother of the Church, Mademoiselle d'Aumale, her confidante, her daily companion, is to remark that Madame de Maintenon was never able to fall into the habit of saying her rosary. To make her say it, her director was obliged to give her a hint, to tell her she was setting a bad example, giving others the impression that she felt no love for the Blessed Virgin, and did not follow the rules of worship connected with her. And as a matter of fact, in all her hundreds of letters to persons vowed by their manner of life to habits of devotion, she never once mentions either the Virgin or any saint: and she admits that the Office she loves best is not the Mass, but Vespers, the saying or chanting of the Psalms. After her own fashion, she is a Protestant living within the Catholic Church. She loves the Reformers, with their pride and their clean lives; she admires their rational-minded integrity; she understands their horror of the stains and abuses that have marked the deadly sickness of the Church. Once back in the Catholic kingdom, these Reformers would be the very salt of its earth. How many of them have returned to it already! All the political chiefs of the party have been converted, now, and since the King has ruled France the question has taken shape: the Catholic majority in the kingdom is earnestly seeking to absorb the opposing element which, like a foreign substance, is thrust into its living flesh, and this re-absorption is indispensable, on pain of sickness or serious peril.

Let us then, when we set Madame de Maintenon on her trial, take into our account the various elements we owe to our advantage in approaching, two centuries after the event, a problem as to which the majority of her own contemporaries were much less well-informed than we are now. History, like human creatures, only reaches the light after an obscure process of gestation, and when our own children come into the world we call them new-born babes, as though they had not begun within ourselves, and did not now bear within themselves, and were not fated to carry on, our powers, our faults, our hatreds, our desires. If we desire to reach a thoroughly clear insight into this business of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, we must begin by gaining one equally clear into that of its promulgation, and into the history of the two schools of thought—the Catholic and the Protestant—all down the century. To set this fatal decision apart as a fresh fact, to see in it a temporary expedient devised by an ignorant Jesuit, a female fanatic, and a King who allows himself to be persuaded that a persecuting ordinance will buy him Heaven's absolution for his own sins, is too summary a proceeding. Madame de Maintenon's famous detractors have traced us so forcible a portrait of an intriguing female bigot that we are forced to make an effort before we can rid our minds of their haunting picture. To the great historian Michelet the Revocation is a shameful business in the course of which Madame de Maintenon (then forty-eight years of age) was conducted into the royal presence by the Jesuit, and promised to the amorous monarch in return for his repeal of the Edict. It is a picture in the Spanish style: the Jesuit plays the duenna, leads in the fair but shameless lady by one hand, and stretches out the other to receive the reward of his complicity! And when Michelet describes a scene, his ink, like Saint-Simon's, is indelible!

Let us endeavour to put away our own conceptions, and the pictures we find in books. We are apt to imagine the Protestants of the seventeenth century to have been like those of the present day, Frenchmen like all their fellows, parted from the Catholics by nothing more than a theological conception of the doctrine of transubstantiation. And yet we are in the year 1684, rather more than half a century since the Protestants, the Edict of Nantes once obtained, have again, thanks to their own vitality and their swelling numbers, become a distrustful State, a vanquished State, in the eyes of which the Edict of Nantes is no edict of union, but a treaty between two adversaries, framed with the object of reducing the weaker party's rights to the strictest minimum. The Edict provided nothing that bore any resemblance to freedom of worship. The permission to have pastors and churches was confined to certain provinces. The Catholic view was that a part had been sacrificed to save the whole, but that this fatal conflagration had left terrible ruins behind it, and a portion of the nation quite cut off; over that dismembered portion the rest shed tears of sorrow. These Protestants were their "separated brothers;" they wept over them, they also feared them; their political aspirations caused alarm. Past events and others, more imminent, in England, showed, only too clearly, whither the stern spirit that reserved its right to criticize and verify every particular might lead.

King Charles II in England and Louis XIV in France, first cousins (both grandsons of Henri Quatre), were bound together by youthful memories, memories of the tragic days when Henrietta of France had sought refuge for herself and her children in the country of her birth. The two princes, who had grown up together, were now in a position to compare their destinies and their States. The King of France was thus able to note the fact, evidenced by the history of two generations, that England was the ally of France, or her enemy, according as Catholic or Protestant influences ruled the great island that lies so close to the French shores. He could note, too, that this throne, so nearly allied with his own, was shaking on its foundations under the pressure of the Protestant party: he was told, and he absolutely knew, that the French Protestants, while they sang psalms in their conventicles, were also putting up prayers for the benefit of the ships sent by the Dutch Republic to watch the English coasts. Surrounded by these Dutchmen, whose spirit of taciturn independence transformed them into our perpetual foes, the French pastor Jurieu was composing his fierce lampoon *La France esclave.*

On every side the King saw threatening clouds, gathering in ever heavier masses. In his mind, and in that of his ministers, the cause of the monarchy, of religion, of the nation, were all bound up together: they made one great whole. This was the point that struck the King. "I am the State!" he had once said, and the State was the Nation; all must be fused into one mass, one metal, bent on expansion and on unity. Unity it must be, not union, and he felt no certainty about attaining it. These views were those of a time when religion formed the very basis of existence, and regulated the constitution of the State, of society, family institutions, life internal and external, politics, men's consciences. In England, at that same period, Catholics were so mistrusted that a papist who brought a convert into the Roman faith was punished with death. There were enough and too many, in that country, of persons whose very existence was a mere matter of toleration: not one more of them would England have; they were cut off from public life with an intolerance more bitter than that with which the Huguenots were treated in France.

Let us bear in mind that the Church was the only instructor in the country. For the populace, beyond her teaching, there was none at all. She was the one great kneader of men's minds. The Church festivals were the only holidays the poorer classes had: the peasant's one relaxation was to hear Mass sung on Sunday mornings, and attend Vespers and Benediction in the evenings. The ceremonies of the Church provided the one element of calm beauty that gave the poor and wretched some glimpse of a better and a fairer world. Many of them never had any teaching at all beyond the words some preacher dropped into their ears. These humble folk saw statues of apostles and kings ranged in symbolic order about cathedral porches. Therefore, said they, a boy born in the fortresses handed over by the late Edict of Nantes will never be a Frenchman like the rest; he will have a quite different spirit; he will cry scorn upon the past history of France; he will never be an integral part of the nation's soul.

Hence the powerful effort directed, since the beginning of the reign, to the recovery, wherever possible, of the brothers from whom the majority had " been parted." The object was to absorb them, even as provinces and territories had been absorbed, by a slow political process: they were of more value than any province. They had been brought up in the hard school of adversity, they were strong, they were self-reliant. Ineligible for the public services, or for the King's, they had taken up most remunerative occupations, they had prospered in them, they administered their wealth wisely, and gave generously to their own poor, to the support of their churches and their pastors; they submitted themselves loyally to the masters they had chosen for themselves. Once reincorporated into the nation, how splendid a contribution would they bring to that nation's patrimony! There was yet time to labour to that end.

Thus it was not Madame de Maintenon, it was the King, the Head of the nation, it was his ministers, and all his political counsellors, who longed with so passionate a desire for the day when the sons and brothers who had been parted from them should be won back, either by love, or failing that, by cruelty. Even in 1668, Louvois had said, " the King will destroy the Reformed religion wherever his arms may come upon it," and the King, on his departure for the campaign of 1672, had confirmed his minister's views with the words, " This is a religious war! "

While the politicians thus thrilled with ardour, the whole Church was stirred to prayer and battle. All the Catholic leaders were at work. Bossuet, with his mighty polemics, leads the fray; he is the Protestants' arch-enemy. He has converted Turenne; his controversy with Jurieu waxes bolder and more pressing from day to day. Even as the Reformers had denounced the abuses and blunders of the Roman Church, so did he denounce the abuses and faults of the Reform, its spirit of rebellion, the cupidity that had led it to demand the dispossession of the German Catholics, the compliance which had purchased the adhesion of the German princes with a veil of legitimacy cast over their offences. He published the document in which Luther, relying on " the right of princes to have concubines," justified the bigamy committed by the Prince of Hesse. He recalled the fact that the schism in England had only taken place because Henry VIII had not succeeded in forcing the law of the Church to bow to his personal passions.

The French Church of that day desired to be utterly Catholic, but by no means Papist. The national feeling that distrusted the Protestants distrusted Rome as well. The Declaration of 1682 defined the Gallican tendencies of the French Bishops: Rome had received that Declaration without satisfaction and without amenity. The Church of France felt that when she expressed her resolve to live a life of her own, she thereby assumed the duty of calling still more explicitly on the "separated brothers" to return, and bear their share in the spiritual and Catholic life that would renew the whole French family, once the fatal separation had been brought to an end. In 1682, the assembled clergy had expressed a longing for this reconciliation, and begged the King to work for it with all his might. The Church felt herself strong enough to take back the sheep she had lost.

She had reformed herself. She had been described as stained with many vices, fallen into ignorant superstitions, chained to the tyranny of Rome; she had revealed herself purified, resplendent. Bossuet, Fléchier, Massillon, Bourdaloue, were her doctors, fathers of the people, who overflowed with charity towards those they taught. These Protestants must be converted, no doubt, but above all, the Catholics needed conversion too, and enlightenment. And that the people might be enlightened, the cloister-gratings had been broken down; the missionaries of Vincent de Paul were wandering by remote paths, in the depths of country districts, rousing the rustics from their torpor, shedding the light of faith and charity upon them; and on their heels came the daughters of Vincent de Paul, in the white cap of the peasant woman of the Île de France, and their full-skirted fustian gowns, sisters of the people in good truth, to dwell among the sick poor, and nurse them and their little ones, and "enlighten" them as well.

And just because this Body Catholic, which had confessed and repaired its shortcomings, felt itself stronger and more pure, it was growing more ambitious.

Sermons, polemics, threats of force, all these weapons and every other, the King and the Church, shoulder to shoulder, would employ. The spiritual victory would consecrate and consolidate every other. Many an historical parallel rose to the lips of the monarch's counsellors. Had not Clovis, Charlemagne, Saint-Louis, all commanded their successors to extirpate the heresy to which they themselves would have given short shrift?

Every method was applied, and with most singular success. This convergence of religious aspiration and the national ideal was bearing fruit. If no more was visible at Versailles than Madame de Maintenon "leading some stray Huguenot into a church," in the provinces there were masses of conversions that delighted the King's heart, and filled him and his ministers with hopes of ultimate success. Every means was worth a trial: persuasion, for those who seemed to hesitate, severity for the obstinate, a merciless constraint, a crushing burden, the *dragonnades*.

Four regiments of infantry, two of cavalry, were ordered to follow the Duc de Noailles into Languedoc, and trample a little on the Huguenots. Forthwith the small towns of Uzès, Alais, and Villeneuve, surrendered at discretion, and after some deliberation, the townsmen of Montpellier became converts in a body. Such all too easy successes elated the King's lieutenants, his missionaries, civil and military. The Duc de Noailles wrote, "I no longer know what to do with the troops, for the people of the places for which I intended them are all becoming converts, and all the troops can do is to spend one night in the places to which I send them." The order to abjure followed on the arrival of the turbulent soldiery; and at once the Duc de Noailles, who refused to content himself with the mere act of submission, requested the despatch of "good and enlightened priests to instruct the populations who desire to be preached to." In that same month of September he foretold 200,000 conversions before the end of the month. Then it was that Madame de Sévigné wrote, "The Père Bourdaloue is going, by the King's order, to preach at Montpellier and in those provinces where so many people have been converted without very well knowing why; the Père Bourdaloue will teach them that, and make good Catholics of them." In Brittany the Duc de Chaulnes was kneading the dough, and behind him Fléchier came, bearing the leaven in his hand. The Abbé de Fénélon, chaplain to the House of the "newly converted ladies," was entrusted with the difficult missions to Poitou and the Saintonge, and made his way to those islands whose dwellers had so often summoned the English boats, and shown them the course they must steer!

These *dragonnades* were directed by Louvois, who was Madame de Maintenon's personal enemy. He, most certainly, did not work under the impetus of her will. Louvois was not a devout man; he acted solely in accordance with his own ministerial views when he adopted these methods of severity in his dealings with those he represented to the King as rebels. The quartering of troops on the province of Languedoc constituted a means of levying vexatious and arbitrary taxation which might quite fairly be employed to crush an unbeliever. Thus, he argued, the said unbeliever would ponder his position, and consider whether his religious convictions were sufficiently profound to make him willing to suffer for them. The King, at Versailles, was aware of the new method of propaganda, but only as a father, accepting the general principle that his rebellious children must be corrected, hands them over to the tender mercies of their tutors. When Madame de Maintenon manifested some apprehension as to these cruelties, the King would tease her, and tax her with having retained "some partiality for persons of the religion," thanks to her Huguenot blood.

She used to hear the minister making his report of the successes announced by the King's lieutenants to his master. Under the pressure of the *dragonnades*, whole villages were repenting of their ways. At Montauban, at Montpellier, at Nîmes, the Huguenots were offering to abjure in tens of thousands at a time. Monsieur d'Aguesseau wrote from Nîmes that in less than three days "sixty thousand souls had announced their conversion." The King rejoiced over this piece of news as over the happy conclusion of some lengthy siege, when the keys of the town are presented to the victor.

He was arranging for a fund of two millions of *livres*, to be applied to the enlargement of the churches, now too small for the new converts crowding into them. And in 1685 the Assembly of the Clergy, who had watched the progress of the conversions with joy and enthusiasm, congratulated the King on his employment of measures which, compared with the ferocious cruelties of the stake, appeared gentle in the extreme.

Little by little, following on all the enthusiastic reports that had reached the King's cabinet, the ill-omened idea sprang into existence. The two words "heresy" and "rebellion" had always been bracketed together in the King's mind. Now that so great a number of his subjects were coming back to him, his thoughts turned with anger to those who still held out. As far as they were concerned there should be no more Edict: patience and gentleness had lasted long enough; there must be an end, a complete end, of a dualism which was a humiliation to the Crown, and a danger to the nation. The very multitude of the conversions became an argument; it was asserted, at last, that the revocation of the Edict would be no more than a formal sanction of an accomplished fact. The Edict was now looked on as a temporary scaffolding, erected in the course of stormy times, to protect an ancient edifice within which the fathers of the builders had said their prayers. In the course of the last hundred years the cracks had been mended, the summit and the foundations had been repaired, the beauty of the original plan had been restored. Unity was re-established, everything purified and revived. Amid the acclamations of both Church and people, the useless planks were to be thrown down, and the country was to behold its masterpiece at last.

And indeed, when, as the result of that sitting of the King's

Council which the Duc de Bourgogne was subsequently to describe, the Revocation was announced, the genuine enthusiasm of the public was very great. In the King's presence, the aged Le Tellier, Chancellor of the Kingdom, who had served the Crown for sixty years, himself drew up the "pious edict," sealing it with his own hands, and—already stricken with the complaint that was to kill him—declared that "having seen this triumph of the Faith, it did not trouble him that he must end his days." They were the last official words the old man spoke, his *Nunc dimittis*. His son Louvois was triumphant too; these cohorts of new converts promised him a supply of splendid regiments. Arnauld, in his Dutch exile, forgot his griefs; exulting, he wrote to express his exultation. In his portrait of a great king, the cold La Bruyère himself wrote the following words, "He must know how to confine himself within the details of his kingdom, and banish any false religion, suspect and hostile to his sovereignty, if he meets one in it." Madame de Sévigné, who always echoed what the great world was saying, took up her pen. "You have no doubt seen," she says, "the edict whereby the King revokes that of Nantes. Nothing is so fine as its contents, and no great King has ever done, nor ever will do, anything so memorable!" And—here a different note is sounded—"No heresy within this kingdom!" writes the Abbé de Rancé. "This is a kind of miracle we should never have believed we were to behold in our days!" Parliament made eager haste to register the Revocation, and amidst this buzz of praise the King believed himself victor over regions to which the light of his sun had never penetrated. The same feeling was in the Duc de Bourgogne's mind when he wrote in his Memorandum, "An operation has been performed which restores to Religion its splendour, to the State its tranquillity, and to Authority its rights.

Nobody, at that moment, had calculated on the unchanging and invincible qualities of a religious temperament. People were under the impression that after a century and a half of resistance and autonomy they might rebaptize the recalcitrants as easily as the populace, in its jubilation, had rebaptized the church-bells that had been calling the Huguenots to their conventicles. Not a soul foresaw that though meeting-houses might be razed to the ground, the mountains would provide retreats for desert gatherings, that persecution might inflict defeat, but could never make a convert. There had been no reckoning up, as yet, of the numbers of men and women who would surely make their escape out of the kingdom—in small parties, by boat, or over mountain paths—in spite of express orders to the contrary, and enjoy the welcome dictated by the self-interest of the smaller Northern States. Guards had been posted on the frontiers, but did those who posted them think they could prevent a spirit from passing over? It did pass over! Louis XIV never dreamt that his violation of the human conscience was to carry its own punishment with it, and that within three years William of Orange was to be served by eleven hundred French officers, all Protestants, all fugitives, who were to help him to beat James II, the King's own protégé, at the Battle of the Boyne!

On January 25, 1686, Bossuet mounted the pulpit of the Church of Saint-Gervais. Before him stood the catafalque, encircled by a thousand tapers, on which the body of Michel Tellier had been laid. The understanding between the dead Chancellor and the living Bishop still endured. With Louvois, the Chancellor's son, they had laboured to the same end; the two ministers, by policy, the churchman, in the cause of his religion. In that hour the song of their common triumph might well ring out over the old man's coffin; the destruction of heresy, the salvation of the heretics, might fitly be declared. The noble chain, the holy concord, the divine contexture, had been re-established. "Our fathers never saw, as we have seen, an inveterate heresy fall suddenly to the ground, the wandering flocks return in crowds, our churches too small to take them in, their own pastors forsaking them without awaiting an order, and glad to plead their banishment as their excuse: a great calm in the midst of so great a commotion; the universe astounded to perceive, in so unusual an event, the sure mark and the most noble use of the power and merit of a prince more known and more revered than even his own authority. Touched by all these wonders, let us pour out our hearts in praise of the piety of Louis, let us raise our acclamations to the skies, and let us say to this new Constantine, this new Theodosius, this new Charlemagne, that which the six hundred Fathers said in the Council of Chalcedonia: "You have strengthened the Faith, you have exterminated the heretics, this is the worthy work of your reign, it marks its true character. Thanks to you, heresy is no more. God alone could have worked such a marvel!"

So it was not Madame de Maintenon who had "driven the machine," it was the King, it was Louvois, it was the doctors of the Church. The measure that lopped a limb from France was born of the blind longing of that reign. It was the consecration of a work of conversion obstinately pushed forward and carried through. And while the Revocation of the Edict was in course of celebration, amid the rejoicings of the populace and the clangor of church bells, Madame de Maintenon held her peace. Not one single word do we find, in any of her letters, concerning the great business the progress of which she must have followed with such deep emotion. Yet the conversion, the absorption of the Protestants, had been the desire, the great work, of her life. Why this silence? Did she feel a doubt? Better than most people she knew the Huguenots, they were dear to her. Her dealings with her family, her own recollections, what she had learnt from her friend Dangeau, what Pellisson had told her, all these things had taught her to realize the struggle, the prayer, the slow advance, of true conversion. These wholesale conversions held no charm for her. Hearing they had been obtained by force, she wrote, "As for those who are converted by fear, what a terrifying state is theirs!"

She had requested a certain respite before she was to take her nephew's Huguenot servants to "some church." In the case of all those nearest her heart she had set to work long beforehand, and she "had not lost one!" The Villettes, the two Mursays, the young Saint-Hermine ladies, the spiteful Caumont d'Addes, all had been gathered in, all had come back. The zeal she had lacked for pushing them into places about the Court had never failed her in the matter of their souls' salvation. When the Revocation was finally decided, she certainly gave it her approval, but she had no hand in persuading the King to order it. The King was fully persuaded already. Louvois did not ask Madame de Maintenon's opinion before he proceeded to the violent measures that led up to the *dragonnades*. Louvois had no tenderness for Madame de Maintenon. He was aware already that she loathed the thing he loved best, war. He dreaded the announcement of a marriage that might bring humiliation on the Crown. It was no pleasure to him, when he entered his master's presence to read him despatches and talk over affairs of state, to see that figure at the King's elbow, bending over the tapestry frame, in the shadow. Madame de Maintenon seldom spoke, but even through her silence the incessant working of a serious mind made itself felt. The King, too, was aware of this internal process, for in the course of some conversation with his minister he would turn and enquire, " What does Your Solidity think of it? "

Her Solidity, when the question was discussed before her, would bow her head, and keep her perplexities, if she had any, to herself. Heresy, in its essence, seemed to her an error fatal to the first principles of life and order. France, at the price of bitter suffering, had cast out her own devil. The King's council had affirmed the fact, the pulpit had proclaimed it, she would have felt it a sin on her part to doubt it. Agrippa's grandchild did not say her rosary, as yet, she liked singing the psalms at Vespers better than going to Mass, but she accepted the political measure extolled by the doctors of the Church in a spirit of obedience. When she thanked God, in her gilded gallery, looking down on the royal chapel, for having led her country according to His will, she also prayed—we may be sure of it—for those Huguenots who still dwelt, who would always dwell, in her thoughts, whose return to their ancient churches she so ardently desired. But from that time forward—and we almost fancy the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes marked a date in the progress of her life—she sought one object only, to devote her existence to reform of another kind, to the diffusion, through her own young subjects, her hundred and eighty-four girls at Noisy, of the knowledge she herself had gathered in the course of many experiences and vicissitudes.

To shelter these young subjects Saint-Cyr was even then in process of construction.

CHAPTER VIII

RELATIONS WITH THE ROYAL FAMILY

The Princess Palatine and Madame de Maintenon—Saint-Simon—Madame de Maintenon and the King—Their private life—The Princes and Princesses—The Dauphin—The Duc du Maine—The education of the Duchesse de Bourgogne—Fénelon and the Duc de Bourgogne.

But before we follow Madame de Maintenon to Saint-Cyr, we will await the entry of Marie-Adelaide de Savoie into the French Court. Not till then will the work of education prepared with such jealous care have reached its full development. Its promoters were still immersed, in the year 1686, in plans, in the collection of handsome furniture, in the careful training, at Noisy, of the persons destined to form the teaching staff. While the institution is in process of construction, we will endeavour to learn the nature of the life led at Versailles by the King's wife, and of her influence upon that royal family, legitimate and legitimized, which inhabited the Palace likewise, and on a footing of intimacy rendered yet closer by a systematic process of intermarriage.

Monsieur, the King's brother, permits his son, the Duc de Chartres, to marry Mademoiselle de Blois, the daughter of Madame de Montespan. The Great Condé allows his valets to lay hands on him, and thrust him into a velvet coat laden with jewels, to attend the nuptials of his grandson the Duc de Bourbon and Mademoiselle de Nantes. Thus did these base-born ladies, now granddaughters of France and Princesses of the Blood, enter the royal family; when men spoke of "the princesses," they spoke, now, of the King's natural daughters. Six years after the Duc de Bourbon had espoused one of the bastards, the Condé family accepted a repetition of the process, and that without the smallest difficulty. This time it was a princess of the blood royal, another of the Great Condé's grandchildren, who was bestowed in marriage on the Duc du Maine. The family is enlarging its borders, its branches twine together, the pure with the impure. Not a voice is raised in protest against these unions, and three times over the House of Condé receives one of the *batardeaux*. In the end, these almost attained the dignity of a " younger branch."

Was Madame de Maintenon consulted as to these marriages? Speaking, one day of the Duc du Maine, the King was heard to say, with merciless good sense, " People of that sort do not marry ! " Was the remark a mere sally? Did Madame de Maintenon find herself forced to plead the cause of this young man, of all the King's children the one she really loved, and beg that he, like his sisters the King's daughters, might have a life of his own? It is quite possible. In any case, this marriage was a pleasure to her. She hoped some good from the little Mademoiselle de Charolais, who seemed so gentle : " If that one fails me," she writes to Madame de Brinon, just at this juncture, " I shall believe that no good thing can come out of the King's family ! " She does her utmost, forthwith, to gain possession of the fifteen-year-old bride, and sends her to Saint-Cyr to make the acquaintance of the model teachers about to begin the great work there. But the young Duchess makes her first appearance in a velvet gown and a cap sewn with fine pearls that stir pity in the moralist's breast : she would have had her in a short-skirted frock, with blue ribbons knotted in her hair, at most, and the sash of the junior classes girdling her waist !

Thus, thanks to all this marrying, the Court circle grows ever wider. The children born of these unions are not only legitimate by Act of Parliament, but by their blood. All of them now are of the " Blood Royal." Madame de Maintenon is the only person who is not.

The chief of all these princes is Monsieur the King's brother, with Madame, his wife. With what feelings do these two mark the presence, close to the King, of the woman who, having risen mysteriously into favour above the heads of all the rest, yet, thanks to the shade in which she elects to spend her life, escapes all criticism? Are they jealous? But how feel any jealousy of a woman who performs her religious duties, keeps her room or vanishes to Saint-Cyr, sits at her spinning-wheel, and spends all the modest liberalities the King bestows on her—four thousand *livres* a month—in charity? How is any one to injure her? The King's respect and affection are her shield; no secret cabal can reach her. The King carries on his life of State and ceremony alone; dines alone and in public every day, attended by his satellites, the Princes of the Blood. Two courses offer: one is to bow to the accomplished fact, accept whatever it may be possible to get out of Madame de Maintenon's influence, and find occasional compensation for the self-restraint this forced attitude of respect involves in fits of hearty though secret merriment; but there is another—to hate her in resolute silence, to build for her, though she will not suspect it, a little Gehenna, where she shall burn in effigy, alive or dead, for the delight of Germany and of posterity. This was the course selected by Madame.

Fourteen years have elapsed since Madame quitted her Palatinate to become Monsieur's wife. The gradual rise of the Governess, the Lady of the Bedchamber, has taken place before her eyes. Now the two are face to face in the same palace; one a princess of royal blood, the other the embodiment of a new, a most strange principle, according to which the moral ideal takes precedence of all other things; the rest being a mere appearance, rank regulated by the accident of birth. Little of French ways has Madame learnt at the French Court! She is a foreigner still, and by degrees, while Madame de Maintenon surrounds the King with the most subtle and essential fluid of French thought, Madame turns back to her own country, longing for it with noisy lamentations. She is German in heart and mind. "I consider it great praise," she says, "when people say I have a German heart!" A Catholic she is, indeed, but quite against her will. When, as a little rustic girl, she was forced, sorely against her own wish and much to her humiliation, to abjure the Reformed Faith, in order to marry the King's brother, she obtained leave to keep her Bible; it is her only book. She has dispensed herself from the necessity of fasting on Fridays and in Lent; she clings to her privileges; they prove she is not a native product of the soil. For the rest, she is a woman whose conduct is more respectable than her principles would warrant; her one genuine article of faith is the supremacy her princely birth confers. She accepted the mistresses, she was really fond of "that poor La Vallière"; favourites, in her eyes, form part of the decorative surroundings of royalty. But one thing she cannot tolerate, and that is an unequal marriage. The respect with which the King inspires her, the affection she seems to have borne him, the certainty of her own disgrace if she dared to attack the enemy, all lead her to preserve an outward peace. But the hatred thus kept in subjection grows daily deeper. The life of seclusion the intruder elects to lead, the unvarying and perfect politeness of her demeanour, the affection shown her by the King's sons, the universal and well-earned respect for her person and her upright conduct, all combine to place the usurper in a position at once impregnable and invincible. This, in Madame's eyes, is an odious piece of trickery. Behind safely closed doors she gives free vent to her fury. It chanced, one fine day, that somebody in Louvois' office grew curious to know what Madame might be setting forth in the endless letters she was sending to her German kinsfolk. The missives were opened. They revealed the fashion in which Madame was abusing the French Court, and holding forth about the King's marriage to "this piece of filth." Madame received a jobation, and the person who gave it her was Madame de Maintenon. The lady shed tears, blew her nose many times, made any number of promises. She was fain to come to terms and sue for peace. So gentle were the methods employed by the insulted party that more than once, in letters ultimately copied by the Ladies of Saint-Cyr, the Princess felt herself obliged to express her gratitude to her enemy. It was really not till after the King's death, as we have already said, that

Madame, then freed from all restraint, began her regular attack upon " the slut," the " witch," who, according to her letters, would never have retained the position she had usurped but for the help of a conspiracy of evil spirits. Not till she was past her seventy-second year was Madame able to breathe out all her spite against the illegitimate spouse. When that moment comes, her pen grows downright abusive. Out pour all the foul old wives' tales, at once indecent and ingenuous, that she dared not send to Hanover while her correspondence was under surveillance. Nobody at Dresden will trouble to verify their truth. They state the number of Madame de Maintenon's lovers; they accuse her of having desired, and let loose, all the wars that have brought desolation on the realm; she it is who compassed the Dauphine's death; she supplied the Dauphin with mistresses; the " old witch " has bought up all the wheat so as to reduce the populace to starvation, and hoarded money in the hope of strengthening her own power; perched on her money-bags, she has debauched the Duchesse de Bourgogne! The maddest myths cause Madame no astonishment. They breed in her brain as fast as she writes them down, and as nobody ever contradicts her, her intemperance of speech and abuse increases day by day. She has no idea she is lying, and if, in our effort to reach a clear comprehension of the relations between " the sisters-in-law," and measure the hatred of one and the deliberate gentleness of the other, we ourselves are driven to anticipate dates, it is because no really open and declared war ever existed between the two. La Baumelle himself never forged a single letter that implied an open breach. The King's perfect grace of manner, in which his real genius for handling persons of both sexes resided, and Madame de Maintenon's religious reserve disarmed all wrath.

We must invariably anticipate dates in connection with the persons who hated this lady, for they themselves only spoke out " when everybody was dead." When Madame, looking back over the past, drew her picture of the object of her curses, the Duc de Saint-Simon, the friend of the Regent's childish days and now his political adviser, was in the habit, as we have already seen, of coming to pay his respects to Madame. He found the old lady's spicy anecdotes and highly coloured tales quite singularly entertaining. That Saint-Simon's portrait of Madame de Maintenon as it appears in his *Memoirs* bears a singular likeness to the description Madame's letters have left us, is a well-known fact. In both there is the same reference to dangerous and occult influences. Madame, in her German fashion, says "the witch, the old sorceress," Saint-Simon, like a Frenchman, says "the fairy, the old fairy." In each case we note the same spite against an incomprehensible power that neither has been able to vanquish, nor even combat. Saint-Simon wrote his *Memoirs* quite late in life. In Madame's time he did no more than collect his materials and make notes of his conversations. His portrait of Madame de Maintenon was painted from a distance; from persons who had lived in familiar intercourse with her he had been able to gather something of what the outer structure of her life had been like, the hours she kept, her gestures, all the external outlines of the "fairy's" existence, as revealed to us with the striking clearness imparted by her own most descriptive pen; but, we say it again, he never obtained the smallest glimpse into her private life. Madame, after being his newsmonger, became the fount of his traditions. He espoused the royal quarrel with all a friend's fidelity, and made it his own quarrel too. He happened to have a horror of the irregularities which had resulted in the bastards being placed in a rank above his own. And in his mind, Madame de Maintenon's elevation was an integral part of this confusion of ranks. Like Madame, he had been held in check and forced into respect; like Madame, he poured out his bitterness in solitude, with no company but his pen, in the gloomy cabinet he called his "shop." That was his outlet: the artist in him released the infuriated nobleman, and supplied his vengeance. When he tells us that Racine died of the disgrace into which he fell with the King because he had dared to mention Scarron in the august presence, and before Madame de Maintenon, he only relies on what he has heard at second—even at tenth—hand;

but the touch gives the crowning finish to his portrait of the inhuman *parvenue.* As a matter of fact, Louis XIV and Madame de Maintenon were present together, three years after their marriage, at a performance of Scarron's *Jodelet maître et valet* in the theatre of the Palace of Versailles; and we cannot doubt they were present of their own free will. But Saint-Simon's satiric touch has "formed our eye." The object of his detestation is the creation of his own pen, and the real witchcraft is his own; for out of the limbo of the past he summons up a melancholy figure, ominous of evil fate and draped in long black laces; in that fact the very proof of his brilliant genius lies; he creates, because he sees and he believes, and before the vision thus created the pale or subtle truth grows dim, and fades out of our sight.

But what is the real truth? What was the real nature of Madame de Maintenon's influence over King and princes? What effect did the unequal marriage genuinely produce? We can easily arrive at that; there is no lack of direct testimony on the subject.

Let us once more assert, in the first place, that she exercised a decisive influence on the King's personal morals. He was forty-five when he suddenly and completely settled down, and chained himself to the armchair of a woman who loved the poor, and talked perpetually to him about the misery of his subjects, and about his own family affairs. This point granted, she also had an undoubted influence over him in religious matters. The King, who had never discovered anything that would curb his passions save the discipline imposed by the Church, had conceived an absolute reverence for this Mother of the Church, who had slowly and victoriously established her dominion over him. Vespers and Benediction are sung in the Chapel at Versailles twice every week, there is a sermon as well; the King goes, so the whole Court goes too. Every Friday the King shuts himself up with the Père de la Chaise, and holds a "council of conscience." But it is not Madame de Maintenon who brings the Jesuit in; she would have been better pleased if the man in charge of the King's conscience had not been in charge, likewise, of the list of vacant benefices; that is a long-standing arrangement which she has not been able to break down. Madame de Maintenon was no great admirer of the disciples of Loyola: the blood of Agrippa in her veins may have accounted for her objection to them. Thanks to that private audience on every successive Friday, the Père de la Chaise was gaining an amount of influence that alarmed her. She would complain bitterly of it to her own confidant, the Bishop of Chartres. She would have preferred to rule the King's soul herself, and quite unaided. Her pride was in her belief that the religious teaching she was able to impart was of a specially superior quality. It was not enough that the King's mind should be kept in a condition of obedient devotion, she desired he should be instructed, she wished him to converse on religious subjects with "enlightened and disinterested men." The King attends Mass every day, but she observes that he "does not read the books, he does not understand Latin"; he honestly believes his presence to be all that is required. Devoutly, with a simplicity that delights us in the man who set forth the rights of the Church of France to the Roman authorities so unflinchingly, he says his rosary. She who longs to be his real guide, she whose eyes follow him from her gilded gallery and note his inattention, would fain inspire him with something of her own passion. The "poor charcoal-burner's" blind and simple faith is not appropriate to so great a King.

Madame de Maintenon's action on the King is slow and continuous; sometimes it is wearisome to him; his business is to reign, not to argue or get into a heat over matters of doctrine. In public, Madame de Maintenon is simply the Marquise de Maintenon, who, if she does show her face at any ceremony, always withdraws herself far to the rear of the Princesses and even of the Duchesses. Her appearances in the King's apartments are few and far between: the monarch still winds up his evenings, like any other family man, surrounded by the Princes and Princesses, his legitimate and legitimized offspring. But regularly every day, before his supper, the King goes to her rooms. There she reigns, so to speak, as mistress of the house, seated in her armchair with great projecting ears that provide so insufficient a shelter from the draughts she abhors, which drove her to say, as she looked on the formal arrangement of her surroundings, " We are destined to perish symmetrically ! " In this refuge the King finds a woman detached from all other things, who is attached to him alone, a true Frenchwoman in mind and heart, and by experience. No woman at Court knows what she knows about the kingdom ; she has lived in its provinces, she is acquainted with its various spheres, and with its families. And, above all other things, she is always on the spot. The Princesses are never at Versailles but when they are obliged, and then only to put in their appearance at some tiresome royal pageant.

Each prefers her home, where she can order her private life according to her taste. Madame, at Saint-Cloud, loves her hunting, her dogs, her Bible, and her writing-table. Monsieur, too, likes to stay at home with his beloved Chevalier de Lorraine, and his collections of medals and gems. The Dauphin buries himself out of sight at Meudon or Choisy : great was his delight when the Grande Mademoiselle bequeathed him a residence of his own. The Duchesse du Maine is busy acting comedies at Sceaux. At Chantilly the Duchesse de Bourbon is playing her spiteful jokes. And all this time there are splendid balls at Versailles, and the men at them cannot dance for lack of partners. Over the royal supper-table a dreary silence often hangs. Madame boasts she is the only person present who dares to say a word. The King performs his Court duties with the majesty and politeness which are his refined and regal qualities. His constant desire, in his supreme position, is to inspire affection for his person. But this buzzing hive, which he has brought into order, indeed, but not into agreement, wearies him. He feels the aridity of his solitude. He would feel it much more, without the devotion of the friend whose intellectual and moral superiority bridges the gulf between his rank and hers. When the King moves about, she follows him : her Books of Hours, her lists of poor folks, lie waiting for her at Fontainebleau, at Marly, even as they lie in her alcove at Versailles. Her life is utterly dedicated to him. "I never see anybody," she writes, "except at Marly!" That is because at Marly the rule of etiquette is less severe. The King himself enjoys living his own life; there he is the host, inviting his own friends; at table, Madame de Maintenon sits facing him.

Till 1691, seven years after the marriage, Madame de Montespan may still be seen, gay as ever, delighting in balls and masquerades. Only when Mademoiselle de Blois marries does she retire, quite unobtrusively. She, too, lays down her arms: she is "converted." No difficulty had been made about her remaining at Court, but none was made as to her departure. A strong and masterly hand it was, we may be sure, that led her to the Convent of the Daughters of Saint Joseph, and prepared her a retreat within those walls, where, keeping, meanwhile, a proud memory of her past, a certain state and circumstance, she might at least feel herself honoured for all the good she did among the poor.

Let us draw closer to the chief personages of the Court, and question them concerning the King's mysterious partner. We shall see how they addressed her, how they wrote to her; we shall understand the nature of that influence of hers—unobtrusive, continuously applied, unvarying in its objects—on the general system of Versailles.

Monseigneur, the portly Dauphin—he of whom Bossuet had sadly said, "With him we go forward, hoping against hope"—Monseigneur held Madame de Maintenon in affection: on a certain grave occasion she had been his confidante. In 1690, when the Dauphine died after bringing the Duc de Berry into the world (already she had disappeared from Court, owing to the melancholy depression that caused her to be taken for a *malade imaginaire*), the question that had once arisen in the King's case arose in that of his son: he must marry again. "I feel," the Dauphin wrote to Madame de Maintenon, "that I should run a risk of not living in chastity. I see no princess who would suit me; I know that the thing in the whole world the King would most dread for me would be that I should sink into debauchery.

Send me word," he continues confidentially, " when I may go and see you, so that we may have a little talk together. Once more," he adds, " silence and a short audience, if you can ! " This is not the letter a man writes to a cruel and hard-hearted stepmother.

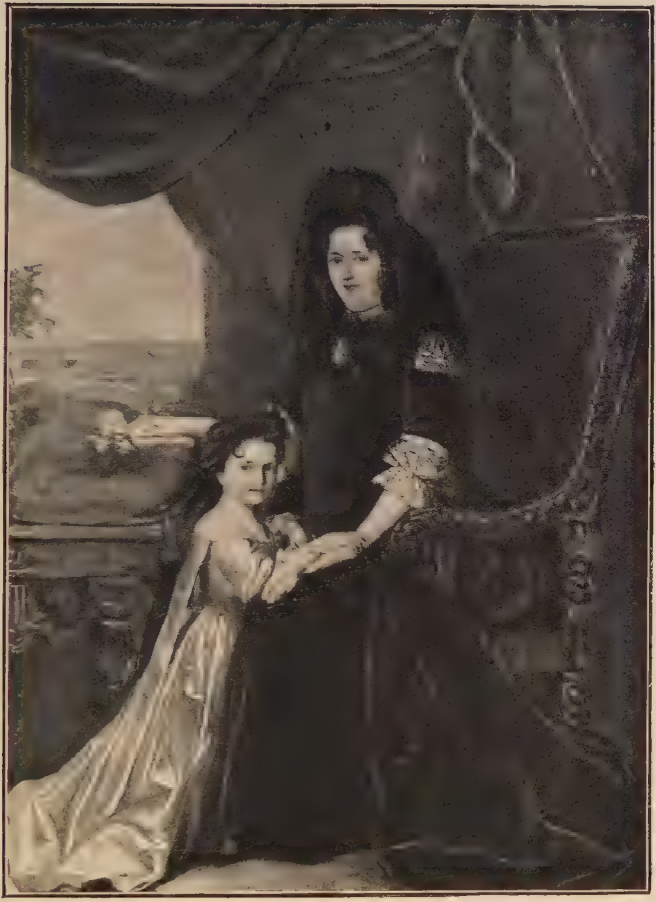
What did the Dauphin confide to Madame de Maintenon? Had he already made fat Mademoiselle Choin his wife, so as to put an accomplished fact between himself and the foreign princesses? This seems more than likely, if we may rely on a few words in another of his letters, which followed close upon the first. " The King has put two of your letters into his packet; I was astonished at your having spoken to me of my wife, it quite took my breath away." Here we find ourselves in the middle of a purely family matter. Monseigneur has " taken the leap." He has married in a way that will certainly be displeasing to the King, who as certainly has been left in ignorance. Madame de Maintenon is fully informed, yet she ventures to slip a letter to his son, containing an allusion to the mystery, into the King's packet. What various shades we have here! Madame de Maintenon goes her way, saying whatever she has to say. In political affairs she is conspicuous by her absence, but wherever there are private matters to be treated, matters wherein nature and conscience strive to bring agreement into their eternal discord, there we shall surely find her. Did she make any effort to dissaude the Dauphin from his obnoxious union with the coarse-looking person whom Madame depicted in the following words, " She had the hugest bosom I ever beheld; those enormous charms of hers were the Dauphin's delight " ? Did she find herself face to face with an accomplished fact? We do not know. Monseigneur's pressing petition for " a short audience, if you please," would imply need of a confidante rather than need of counsel. He may have pleaded his right to do what the King himself had done, to lead his own private and domestic life; the same arguments lay to his hand; three young princes were living, and ensured the continuation of the royal line. Perhaps Madame de Maintenon's breath, too, was taken away. It was a delicate matter to discuss. No doubt she strongly exhorted the Dauphin to keep his own counsel about a marriage that would certainly cause humiliation to the King; and so great was Monseigneur's discretion that Saint-Simon, that sorcerer, knew nothing of it, and Voltaire, who guessed all things, possessed no certain knowledge of it. Good-natured, unassuming, ungrasping, Mademoiselle Choin lived on; hidden in her rooms just over the ground floor at Meudon, she provided her lord with a private existence eminently suited to the tastes of that inveterate sportsman, whose nature, simple and somewhat gross, shrank from the life of courts, and all the elegant display connected with it. Mademoiselle Choin satisfied his physical needs and his dull mind. The question once settled, he never mentioned it again.

Madame de Maintenon still remained his friend and counsellor. "I count you," he writes, "as the best friend I can have, and you would be doing me a pleasure, should I do something unpleasing to the King, if you would warn me, so that I might endeavour to do better." From this time forward he was to have a means of access to his august and all too distant parent. Passing through Madame de Maintenon, the too great difference between them seemed less alarming. The "stepmother" sometimes wrote hard things to the Dauphin: "Your rank will bring you bows and curtseys, but nothing but merit will attract esteem!" The saying is a severe one, and the veracious friend does not confine herself to precept only. By her remarks, by her incessant correspondence, she strives to bring about a union between the Dauphin and the King of France such as father and son have never known as yet. We find her writing with a certain pride in 1698, "They (the King and the Dauphin) have written each other letters that would have made you shed tears of affection for them both. Is it not true, Madame, that all good people must witness this union with great joy?" The Dauphin lets her rouse him out of his torpor. "All I will tell you," he writes, in his simple way, "is that I use my best endeavours to become capable of something." Andagain, "Your letter has once more given me so much pleasure, by telling me that the King is pleased with my conduct, and my feelings for himself, that I cannot resist thanking you for it, and assuring you that you will always find a true friend in me." The Dauphin found it far easier to approach the "Roi-Soleil" by way of that tranquil region where the hot rays fell less scorchingly upon him. Very modestly he passed within its borders, praying his protectress-friend to express his sentiments as a son and as a subject to the King.

Very different were the frequent letters that reached the hands of the Duc du Maine's former Governess from every camp to which her restless young favourite betook himself in search of military glory. Invariably he had something to say, some request to make. This youthful and legitimized prince, son and grandson of the royal house, who limps along in his place after the Princes of the Blood, and before the dukes and peers, lives on the perpetual *qui vive*. Even now he is not satisfied; he is resolved to stand facing the Dauphin, in the very forefront, under the King's eyes. He plays on Madame de Maintenon's feelings as on those of an adoptive mother who, unreasonable though he may be, still nurses a secret tenderness for the child she has brought up under her wing. He is the sole weakness of her heart; he knows it, for he is extremely shrewd. Thanks to the unceasing anxiety of a position which is uncertain, at any rate, even if it be uncontested, the little bastard works himself into a fume. Full well he knows that to his rank he must indispensably add merit, the renown of a successful warrior. Madame de Maintenon is on the spot to read his letters to the King, and make her own comments on them. "Tell the King, Madame, how deeply I feel everything that reaches me from him. Describe me as moved by his kindness. Seek the strongest expressions, and fear, even then, that in spite of all your wisdom you have not said enough. Choose them, in fine, according to your own taste, and give free play to your imagination!" And that his infirmity may serve his ends, he writes, just before the Battle of Fleurus, "It would make me very happy, Madame, if a lame man's service could be a source of satisfaction to the King." The allusion must have gone to the father's heart. The favourite son preferred commanding troops in camp to " limping about," as he put it, prettily, " in front of people whom the sight distresses." But he had no desire that his confidante, to whom he would write as many as eleven letters in the course of a few weeks, should err on the side of discretion. After relating his feats of valour with considerable pride, he adds, " You must understand, Madame, that this detail is not for your ear alone." To stir her solicitude, he coaxes his motherly friend like any artful child." " Work," he says, " for your dear child, if you think him worthy to be acknowledged by you ! " And as in time of war the most valiant is ever in the forefront of the battle, he tries to turn the dangers into which he runs to good account. " Remember that on this occasion the other princes are of no account : take advantage of this ! " If he could have his will, he would be on the battlefield, to win glory there, and at Court, to defend himself against attack, all at one and the same time. " Your affection delights me; the only thing it lacks is that you ought to give a less kindly reception to those who speak evil of your darling ! " The truth is that his extremely clear-sighted friend not only listens to her favourite, but makes investigations of her own, and he goes in fear of her perspicacity. On occasion she will even find fault with him, and then the rogue plays on her tenderness. What ! There he is on the breach, his life imperilled, and she writes to him " with harshness " ! " Instead of encouraging me the moment I go into danger, you scold me, and as soon as I am out of it, you are grieved ! " She stimulated that intermittent vanity of his, we may be sure, and strove to turn it to account " for the glory of the prince and the honour of the King." " Have I ambition ? " he writes ; " I overflow with it, Madame, and also with submission to the King's commands ! " His heart is in the words. " I cannot fail," he says, " so long as you are my guide ! " He played upon her weakness.

To guide was to do that which she by no means disliked, and in which, indeed, she did excel. Fain would she have brought all this royal offspring, with its mingled origins, into order. Sometimes she felt the King uneasy at the sight of these dubious princes growing up around his throne. Here was a terrible problem. Its solution, in Madame de Maintenon's mind, was of a moral nature. All her virtues, like all her faults, were rooted in the one principle that ruled her life; to her, merit, in any human creature, sufficed to absolve that person, when absolution was needful. Merit, sustained by the practice of a healthy religion, was capable of effacing the original stain of illegitimacy. God, in His mercy, had absolved the King; his children may have been born with a stain upon them, but they could wash it off, it was their duty so to do; and she, with all her counsels, all her effort, laboured to prevent the excrescence on the royal house from continuing to be a deformity.

Madame de Maintenon's intercourse with the rest of the King's children was of a very different nature. The princesses paid her a forced deference that masked a secret impatience of her guardianship; she treated them with chilly correctness, and judged them with severity. During the period of their education she had done her best for them; she had lost all affection for them; the indolence, the vanity, the endless bickerings of the King's daughters had quite disheartened her. The Duchesse du Maine, a tiny creature, light as a feather, was the will-o'-the-wisp of the Court, and, thanks to her caustic wit and her sly tricks, alternately the joy and the despair of her immediate circle. Madame de Maintenon, with all her vigilance, had not been able to prevent Mademoiselle de Mursay from setting up a friendship, at Versailles, with Mademoiselle de Nantes. Both were married now, and free to seek each other's society afresh. Mademoiselle de Mursay, now Madame de Caylus, was extremely unhappy in her married life, and exceedingly imprudent in her conduct, too. Monsieur de Caylus having forsaken her, after two years of marriage, " without a *sou* and without a gown," she consoled herself, in Madame du Maine's company, with waggish pranks that sorely grieved her aunt. Both ladies were reprimanded " to the last extreme." Upon that they played the hermit; they were seen depart-



Madame de Maintenon and her Niece Françoise d'Aubigné, the future Duchesse de Noailles

ing from Versailles with contrite faces, to do penance in a private residence belonging to the Duchesse du Maine, which they affected to call "the desert." This "desert" became the scene of collations, entertainments, and gambling parties. The aunt watched the intimacy with a heavy heart. When she left Versailles to follow the King, she would confide her niece to the care of the austere Madame de Montchevreuil, and then, on both sides, tears and lamentations would ensue.

Thus, from princess to princess, and from the princesses to their friends, the infection, teeming with biting sneers and vanity and flirtation, spread itself abroad. In that turbulent little clan, the Mortemart spirit found full scope. The Duchesse du Maine brought her petulance, the Duchesse de Chartres, her heedless talk. This last princess took pride in the nickname her husband had bestowed upon her, "*Madame Lucifer.*" The other was "*La Lendore.*" Meanwhile the tall Princesse de Conti would wrangle with her brother-in-law, the young prince of the same name; she kept up a satirical correspondence with him, in which the King and Madame de Maintenon both had to "stand their fire." Both correspondents were equally insolent and irreverent. The letters were seized, and the King was saddened by their perusal. Then Madame de Maintenon had the delinquent brought into her presence, and made her read her own impertinences aloud. She was fain to weep and humble herself, and promise good behaviour for the future. But these things, though forgiven, were not forgotten.

So when, in 1696, Marie-Adelaide de Savoie joined this group of idle and unquiet children to take her place as granddaughter of France and wife of the future Dauphin, in a kingdom where, for the moment, neither Queen nor Dauphine existed, what hopes sprang in every heart! She was just twelve years old. The first time the King saw her, he spent his evening describing her to Madame de Maintenon, telling her all about her hair, her skin, her teeth, her bust. At Versailles, the child at once showed her nature to be lively, sensitive, affectionate. The King regarded her as a little chosen flower he was to plant in the soil of France. At last, among all his progeny, he was to have two children whom he might really love, on whom he might set his hopes—the Duc and the Duchesse de Bourgogne.

The care Madame de Maintenon lavished on the Duchesse de Bourgogne will be revealed to us in the course of the years of her life that still remain to be described. From this moment onwards the darling and the hope of the French throne is to live under the clear and watchful eyes of the woman to whose care she has been committed by the King, the woman she addressed, on the very day of her arrival at Versailles, as "My aunt! My good aunt!" and sprang into her lap. The child has learnt from her mother that her first duty is to please the King, and she does her best to please him by her caressing ways with the grave-faced lady she knows to be a person of so much importance. There are to be no more State educations. The King in person becomes the newcomer's affectionate guardian. He has had her married, as a matter of form, and has then made her over to Madame de Maintenon's care, while the Duc de Bourgogne, in Fénelon's hands, grows daily wiser, more tractable, more self-controlled. Madame de Maintenon and Fénelon are labouring in a common cause: this is their meeting-point. They are to form the characters of the two young people: he, the Dauphin's; she, his bride's; and within the walls of the same Palace. They exchange views, so that their skilful hands may work in unison to train the young couple on whom the hopes of France are centred. The little Adelaide's youth is full of promise; no more will the kingdom see a foreign Dauphine heaving homesick sighs. This twelve-year-old girl will embody all that is noblest and greatest in the kingdom's life. She will be the true *fleur-de-lys* of France, and Madame de Maintenon will cultivate the blossom with the tenderest care. The Duchesse de Savoie, mother of the future Dauphine, wrote to Madame de Maintenon, as one mother to another, confiding her child's education, scarce begun, as yet, to her care. As always, Madame de Maintenon was perplexed at first. "The more she thought over the undertaking," writes Mademoiselle d'Aumale, "the more difficult it seemed to her. She perceived, too, that to accomplish this education she would have to go back into the world she had renounced. She laid her doubts before the Bishop of Chartres, who strongly advised her to put aside all ideas that might deter her from doing that which she was desired to do, and that she must undertake it, and that whatever she did for that person would be a service rendered to France."

Weary of princes though she was, the entreaties of the child's mother, those of the King, and her director's commands, all moved her, and she consented. Henceforward the training of the Duchesse de Bourgogne was numbered among the good works to which her life was to be devoted. From that time the little girl enjoyed a genuine family life, between the King and her mysterious "aunt." Every day after her dinner she went into Madame de Maintenon's apartment, where the King would join them. After so many years of splendour and dissipation, he had at last attained that which he had long sought, a scene of domestic life such as might have been discovered, at that hour, in the home of any ordinary citizen; a grandfather seated at his writing-table and working with his secretary, and, on the opposite side of the fireplace, a grandmother and a quite young grandchild, stitching at their tapestry, and whispering their little everyday secrets as they stitched. The King was just on the brink of that old age which, in his case, was to last so long; he delighted in these quiet hours, he loved to spin them out. In this young creature he beheld once more the youth, the gaiety, the varying moods, the little feminine caprices which, in former days, had moved him all too easily; a ray of sunshine had fallen upon his winter quarters. Even as, in the past, Madame de Maintenon had carried the baby Duc du Maine away in her ample cloak, so now, in the sight of all the world, she gathered the new Princess of France within the voluminous folds of her semi-regal mantle. In the intimacy of these long conversations, the aunt must surely have expressed her own poor opinion of this world's vanities. The child would listen; with an expression at once curious and grave she would hearken to the praises of him to whom she had been solemnly wedded, but whose wife she was not, as yet.

This work of education was all the more important, because when, at some future period, Monseigneur, husband of Mademoiselle Choin, came to the throne, the Duchesse de Bourgogne would be the lady of the highest rank at Court. It could never be too soon to teach the child the precept with which the " aunt's " mind was so profoundly imbued, that no Princess of France could be a really great princess unless she were, first of all, a woman of pure life, enlightened concerning the people God had committed to her care, and that the perfection of this private life was the guarantee of her perfect performance of her public duties. We shall see the Duchesse de Bourgogne mingling, at Saint-Cyr, with the daughters of the poorer nobility, there being trained under the new system. She must be perfect, this young princess! In her case, and in her husband's, " divine right " will reign in most harmonious fashion. For in his dealings with the Duc de Bourgogne, Fénelon is following the same methods; he may even be prompting Madame de Maintenon—they are marching abreast, at all events. More human in feeling than Bossuet, more considerate in his treatment of human frailty, he has succeeded in kindling the pure flame of an eager soul in the young man's fiery nature. Together, and with endless care, the two mentors were laying the foundations of a perfect reign. They could not contemplate the possible sovereignty of Monseigneur otherwise than with silent dread; day by day he grew heavier, duller, more indifferent to councils and the business they discussed. But on the steps of the throne, close to his somewhat failing father, would stand the son, the monarch of the future, the morrow's hope. Marie-Adelaide, in the absence of a Queen, would be the pattern, the refuge, for every woman. Far-away hopes, indeed, but they were genuine!

To Fénelon, to Madame de Maintenon, they seemed to shine out of those young creatures' eyes. Nobody realized more deeply than these two the cardinal lack of the existing reign—humanity. Great plans were conceived, and carried out by the labour of a deserving and hardworking population; but it was a suffering population. The time was now drawing near when, the people having laboured for the King, the King would labour for the people, and thus the cycle of magnificence would close in kindness. This was Fénelon's hope, for this he laboured with his whole heart, as to his own pupil, and between him and the lady who had undertaken the future Dauphine's guardianship, the understanding, tacit or formal, was complete.

That Madame de Maintenon was on friendly terms with Fénelon is an undoubted fact: he proved it when, on his appointment to the Archbishopric of Cambrai, he begged the ceremony of his consecration might be performed in the Chapel of Saint-Cyr—in the domestic circle, as it were, and under the special patronage of Madame de Maintenon. A letter from Fénelon to Madame de Maintenon indicates the extremely delicate shade that tinted their relations at this moment. In the course of a minute analysis such as no friend would offer nor accept, save in the case of two determined searchers after truth, Fénelon puts her on her guard against her own tendency to heavy-heartedness, against that vexed spirit of hers, so prone to fall into "suspicion." Artfully he transmits, as from a third person, the blame he himself desires to convey: "People say you do not concern yourself sufficiently about business affairs"—and if he passes the criticism on, it is because he thinks it justified. He thinks her a little "suspicious." Is it that he would fain bring her under his own persuasive rule? Already they are in agreement on so many points! Why is Madame de Maintenon suspicious? Why will she not confide her thoughts to a friend, an ally, who lives within two paces of her own door? The man who was Madame de Maintenon's director might surely control the King a little too! If she would open her heart, if her suspicions could be lulled, if she would concern herself about affairs . . .?

Madame de Maintenon certainly felt a regard for Fénelon, she proved it; but for the matters of her inmost soul she would have no director save a man who had no connection with the

Court. The Abbé Gobelin has grown old and feeble; the grandeur of his penitent of the days of the Rue des Tournelles has dazzled his eyes. He has ceased to be the director, he is only a respectful and faint-hearted old gentleman. When he writes her letters, his pen makes flourishes in spite of himself. Madame de Maintenon does all she can to steady it. "Write to me," she says, "as if I were still with the Filles Bleues in the Rue des Tournelles!" But his reply is just as full of expressions of respect, and confidential communications; he tells her of his uneasiness about his lawsuits. Then we catch a note of scorn: "Put your trust in God, or in the King, or in myself—the least of us three will suffice you!" She must have a stern counsellor, a judge, to care for her soul. Fénelon shall not be that judge, nor Bourdaloue, nor Bossuet; and her choice falls on a man who would have been the director of her dreams if she had lived into old age as a devout inhabitant of the Filles Bleues—the Abbé Godet-des-Marais, a priest in whose mind conscientious scruples rank above all other things. In his presence every grandeur bows its head; his instructions are both abundant and minute; like the Abbé Gobelin of the old days, he weighs every matter. When Madame de Maintenon gave her confidence to this humble priest, she did it in the full conviction that for her there was no salvation, in God's eyes, save in a life of voluntary retirement. There was a deep sincerity in the words she employed to express the peculiarity of her own fate when, deprecating the affectionate homage paid her by her friends at Saint-Cyr, she exclaimed, "I am not great, I am only raised up!"

At Court, the respect for her desire to remain in the situation she had chosen for herself still endured. Not a finger was laid upon her mystery. Dangeau, who, let us remember, began to keep his journal in the very year of her marriage, and set down his flying notes about the King for thirty years after, never made an allusion to it, nor even dropped an involuntary clue. Yet he certainly knew all about it. Day after day he names Madame de Maintenon as one of the ladies the King takes with him in his coach. He notes the King's daily visits to her, and that is all. Yet everybody knew! Mignard, one day, had painted Madame de Maintenon's portrait, in the habit of Sainte-Françoise, for the King. It was a clever invention. But a delicate question cropped up. Should the ermine mantle, the token of royalty, be depicted on the shoulders of this Françoise? Or should it be omitted? The painter ventured to submit the question to the King. My readers will note the really exquisite taste that dictated the evasive answer: "Certainly," the King replied; "Sainte-Françoise richly deserves it!"

CHAPTER IX

SAINT-CYR

Madame de Maintenon at Saint-Cyr—Regulations—Dress—Racine—Esther—Louis XIV at Saint-Cyr—Reform of the Institute, grown too mundane—Mademoiselle de la Maisonfort, and the difficulty about Quietism—Crisis in the relations between Louis XIV and Madame de Maintenon.

THE time has come: let us now make our way into Saint-Cyr; the work of the establishment is in full swing; here we see Madame de Maintenon's own realm. On the very morrow of her marriage she conceived her idea, and proceeded to ponder it. She has worked it out, at last, to a successful conclusion. Mistakes there have been, moments of doubt, too—right well she knows it; and if, while she was bringing princes up at Court, she had fancied herself infallible, she has learnt in the course of this matter to realize the danger of falling into error, even though she has not actually fallen into it, and discovered that 250 girls and thirty nuns are more troublesome to manage than the greatest king in all the world.

From the outset the King had smiled on the idea of founding an educational establishment for the daughters of his nobility. What pleased him most about the plan was that the projected foundation was not to be a convent. He would remark, with an air of satisfaction, "We are not setting up a convent!" and Madame de Maintenon would repeat, "Not a convent!" She was still the woman who had preferred Scarron to the veil. The description adopted was the word Institute—an institute which its founders desired to keep out of the Romish jurisdiction, and which was to owe obedience to the King alone. He endowed it as a father gives a dowry to his child, and gave it Madame de Maintenon as its first Foundress. Two hundred and fifty girls of poor but noble families were to be brought up on the 100,000 *livres* produced every year by the enormous Abbey of Saint-Denis. This benefice had been vacant since the death of the Cardinal de Retz, a former leader of the Fronde. The arrangement would give the country one abbot the less, and a large increase in the number of its faithful children, in his stead. If the 100,000 *livres* did not prove sufficient, the royal treasury promised to add another 50,000, and in the end it was found necessary to add yet another 30,000. The King himself, in his leisure hours, and with his own pen, set forth the proposed constitution of the foundation, and studied it with Madame de Maintenon, just as in former days he had studied the garden plans for Clagny with Madame de Montespan. Each of his favourites, every one of the princesses, had been, or was, in possession of her private residence: Madame de Maintenon was to have Saint-Cyr. She should do as she liked there, with her saintly friends.

And how she does love Saint-Cyr! There, after her astounding marriage, her spirit dwells and labours. Elsewhere she has been under the necessity of striking out, or correcting; she has never had a free hand. Here she creates. She is to choose all her own elements: directors, mistresses. She it is who is to supply, day by day, all that will ensure the development, the perfect health of these blossoms, not to be found elsewhere within the confines of the kingdom. Under God's eyes, under the eyes of the King of France, the daughters of Saint-Cyr are to enter on their destiny as children of Heaven and of the Kingdom; their instructress will be their mother too, in so far as a woman may who, though she has never borne a child, will apply all the excellent methods studied and discussed a thousand times and more in closest council.

Let it be said again: this was not to be a convent. The King was determined to be freed from Rome, and on the other hand, to remedy the saintly "foolishness of convents," the childish bigotries of "ignorant nuns," and also the giddy behaviour of those religious who were to be seen "gadding about the world." Yet to everything there must be a beginning: there was not at that moment, in the whole of France, a single woman who had devoted her life to the work of teaching, and who was not a nun. But one nun, at all events, Madame de Maintenon knew, who was an enlightened woman, who had studied history, who read the poets, even wrote verses of her own: Madame de Brinon, the Superioress of Noisy.

Twelve young girls belonging to the Noisy establishment were put into her hands. Madame de Brinon made them undergo a regular noviciate. She would have been glad to find some other word to describe this unusual period of probation. Into its course, one of the twelve selected ladies tells us, a judicious mixture was introduced: the theory of instruction and the duties of the various posts as established by the founders of the institution; retreats here, lectures there; intervals of silence and of prayer. The young ladies learned what they had never learnt before—the art of teaching. And when the time came, four only, out of the twelve, were chosen as seeming sufficiently imbued with the modern spirit to permit of their employment as the young mothers of the new foundation. They were to be bound to it, but only by simple vows. The Abbé Gobelin was the director chosen for this little group of nuns. Madame de Maintenon brought her own friends with her, and shed the light of counsels which had been the secret guides of her own existence upon the new undertaking. Manceau, her man of business, acted in the same capacity for the Institute, and Nanon, her waiting-woman, now respectfully addressed as Mademoiselle Balbien, was its directress. The King was delighted. He said to Racine and Boileau, " Do not omit the foundation of the Institute from the annals of the reign! " and Boileau wrote, " If any nobleman ventured to be the detractor of Madame de Maintenon, he would deserve to be struck off the archives of the nobility as having become guilty of the blackest ingratitude." Madame de Maintenon spent her whole strength upon the work; when she entered those classrooms, " each hung with the colour worn by the young ladies, the walls covered with maps fastened with ribbons of the same shades, and frames, and bookshelves," she felt really at home. "It was a delight to her to visit the dormitories, along which there was a clear view from one end to the other . . . the beds ranged in excellent order, and also hung with the colours of each class, and the curtains fastened at the foot of each with a silken ribbon of the same colour." Here she sought harmony in simplicity, just as at Versailles the object was harmony in splendour.

The matter of dress had to be considered too. The same idea prompted the first sketches made by the Instructress herself. This dress was not to be a convent garb, and when the first had been planned and made, Madame de Maintenon made her old servant Nanon put it on, so that the King might pronounce upon it. The sober dignity of the habit pleased the King; the skirt was of handsome black tammy, with a good petticoat beneath it, the linings of ratteen for winter, and of striped fustian for summer wear; black morocco shoes, and black tanned leather gloves, with white gloves inside them; a white linen collarette fastened with narrow ribbons, a black silk cap, with a daintily gauffered gauze frill that framed the face, and over the cap a gathered veil that fell to the elbows; on the breast, a gold cross studded with *fleurs de lys*, bearing an engraved Christ on one face, and on the other a Saint-Louis. For this Racine had written an inscription which might apply either to the cross, or, discreetly, to the Foundress; it ran—

Elle est notre guide fidelle,
Notre félicité vient d'elle.

For attendance in chapel there was a noble mantle, very long and ample. The King's only objection affected one small detail: he desired to see a little more white linen falling under the wide sleeves, and a little of the hair shown, very modestly, under the frilled gauze. That done, he was quite content: there was "nothing that savoured of the convent," the ladies would really look like daughters of that Sainte Françoise who had worn her ermine mantle and her fustian gown together; they would be nuns in the same way as some knights of old had been monks, and though they would serve the Church, they would yet be the daughters of the King, their Founder. This much decided, a dress was sketched for the young pupils. "No black!" said the King at once. Brown tammy was chosen for skirt and cloak, and a somewhat stiffly boned bodice was imposed on the young forms. Simplicity there must be, but linked with correctness of style and even beauty. The headdress was of white linen edged with lace, the youthful tresses left fairly free; more lace about the neck, and muslin cuffs. Thus garbed, the pupil of Saint-Cyr was no convent child huddled into garments that contradicted the very idea of beauty; the grace of youth was heightened by the modesty of its attire; life at Saint-Cyr was to be a lesson, as it were, in dignified and healthy behaviour—a lesson to be carried into the later life, spent in the great world. "No nuns!" the King had said again, "women!" And he insisted, further, that each of the ladies and children of Saint-Cyr should have her own drinking-cup and spoon and fork, all of silver: no sordid penitential furnishings; no truckle beds and straw mattresses; beds, clean and neatly made, with their curtains hanging in handsome folds. The fact would thus be taught that a certain display is rightly attached to the dignity of rank. There was no question, here, of abdicating existence in the false poverty of a wealthy conventual life, but of a preparation, on the contrary, for existence in the outside world, for making a wise use of that gift of God, accepting a due share of its mortifications for oneself, and giving others their just share in all it provides of things that charm and cause delight. On the other hand, no presents were to be accepted, and stringent regulations forbade any irruption of brilliant company from the Court into the precincts of Saint-Cyr. It was also ordained that no guest was ever to be entertained at any meal: the Princesses, if they first asked and obtained Madame de Maintenon's permission, might pay a visit; but they were to be received with full ceremony, and as seldom as possible.

To conclude, the King was extremely anxious that the

Ladies of Saint-Cyr should never, in conversation between themselves, address each other as " Sister " or " Mother," but always as " Madame," followed by the family patronymic, dear to the monarch and to France. The King reserved to himself the duty of receiving applications for admission to Saint-Cyr, having the applicants' claims to noble birth investigated by his own genealogist, and replying to their requests. And as he desired to see these young girls enter the married state, he requested Madame de Maintenon to look about for " sons-in-law," and had a certain sum out of the endowment fund of Saint-Cyr reserved, so that every year the twenty young girls leaving the Institute might be provided with a small dowry of three thousand francs, to buy their wedding outfit.

On these lines, and after many a consultation and trifling alteration, the Institute came into being, and began its work. The King and Madame de Maintenon now possessed something they could watch over in common. To this old couple the children of the valley stood in the stead of their own posterity. When she looked round upon her daughters, within that secluded retreat over which her own spirit brooded supreme, the Governess would say, " This is the place of my retirement and my death ! " With it her affections, her energies, her future hopes, were all bound up.

When she opens her eyes, every morning at Versailles, her first thought is to wonder whether she will be able to go to Saint-Cyr. Her great desire is that her influence over the place should be daily and continuous. We see her getting into her coach to go there. The King goes with her. We may find the picture ready painted for us by the pen of Madame Dunoyer, among the papers left by the Lady of Saint-Cyr who bore that name. " The Countess of Exeter," says she, " had expressed a wish to see Madame de Maintenon, so a friend who was conducting her made her stand aside just as Madame de Maintenon was preparing to get into her coach with the King, and said ' Look at her well ! ' Madame de Maintenon made her appearance unattended, dressed in a plain dead-leaf-coloured damask gown, and wearing a morning cap, her sole ornament a cross made of four diamonds hanging from her collar—the only article to which her name has been given. She took her seat in the back of the coach, beside the King, and recognizing the English lady as she passed, saluted her with one of those grave smiles in which sweetness and majesty both bear their part. The Countess was enchanted with the air of gentleness and modesty that accompanied all her actions. She thought her eyes were beautiful, her physiognomy refined, and about her altogether that indescribable something that age cannot take away, and which is better than the greatest beauty. She did not seem taken up with her own grandeur, and appeared to give her whole attention to seeing whether the King was comfortably seated. As soon as she had taken her own seat, her needlework—a piece of tapestry—was brought to her. She took out her spectacles at the same time, and having drawn up the coach windows, she began to work."

After this fashion, old age was to creep upon her. That refined face was to grow hollow, the flame that burned within her was to give it a transparent look, to the end her eyes were to retain their splendid brilliancy. Always she would appear dressed in plain damasks, dead-leaf or violet, monastic colours, her Maintenon cross hanging below her collar, a little gold embroidery on her skirts, her white hair shining silvery beneath her black lace hoods. For Court wear this style of dress may be somewhat severe, but the Instructress, thus soberly attired, reminds her pupils that correct habits must be kept up, that they themselves belong to the great world.

Whenever she was at Versailles, the Ladies tell us, she came to Saint-Cyr every other day, to spend the entire day, and passed every morning there as well. She would arrive at six o'clock in the morning, would leave again at six in the evening, and busy herself about every detail connected with the establishment, from the education of the young girls to the management of the community. The youthful Ladies of Saint-Cyr who were engaged in the task of opening young minds were themselves hardly more than children, and their Superioress, Madame de Brinon, had made it clear from the first that she was not likely to be exempt herself from the very faults the founders had flattered themselves their Institute would escape. They had no desire for the presence of ignorant nuns, nor of an Abbess of witty mind and sumptuous tastes, and now this *ci-devant* Superioress of Ursuline nuns, with her elegant speech and her exquisite tastes, was threatening to import a whiff that recalled the perfume of a fashionable abbey into the atmosphere of Saint-Cyr. Madame de Maintenon realized it, took her measures forthwith, and not content with the mere title, began to exercise the functions of the Instructress.

When she reached Saint-Cyr, she attended early Mass, receiving the Sacrament four times a week, and then employed her mornings in holding classes for the younger nuns. Writing, spelling, history, everything needed her attention. And she had a new lesson to teach—how to instruct children, how to train them. Her work in the novice's classrooms done, she might be seen in the steward's office, going through the accounts with Manceau, or in the room where the pupil's clothes were kept, making Nanon open her cupboards. Every day she would go to the kitchen and taste the soup or the joint: no detail was too insignificant, in her eyes. "Our Ladies," she would say, "are children, who will not have learnt to govern for a long time yet. I offer to serve them, with all my people, and it will be no trouble to me to be their housekeeper, their woman of business, and their servant too, with all my heart, if only my care may enable them to do without one. That is my aim, that is the wish of the depths of my heart, that is at the bottom of my activity and my impatience." How like her is that passionate longing to attain her object! To concentrate the full weight of her effort on this home for young girls she has, as she says, brought in all her own servants. She begins with the King, she ends with her own waiting-woman. If Saint-Simon sees Madame de Maintenon as "the fairy," Mademoiselle Balbien is surely the "half fairy." Together they draw up plans and calculate expenses: old Nanon is stuffed full of experience.

In the department of things spiritual, Madame de Maintenon's former director, the Abbé Gobelin, is the first director of the Institute; his place is taken, at a later date, by the Abbé Godet-des-Marais. Thus unity is ensured in every quarter. One and the same principle is to rule the whole organization. And further, when the See of Chartres falls vacant, Madame de Maintenon obtains the offer of the bishopric to her director, Godet-des-Marais. She had to put pressure on him. He loved his cell, with its poor bed and its strawbottomed chair, and the map of the Holy Land, its sole and only decoration, hung on the wall. But his elevation would render the unity still more complete. The Bishop to whom the Institute would owe official obedience would be the director, the judge, the confidant, of its Instructress. Not a link would be lacking to the chain between the supreme authority and the frailest and humblest of its youthful denizens.

Thus no accident, no error could occur without swift application of the remedy. Madame de Maintenon was an architect in her way, and the edifice she was building was rationally planned, so that each part might contribute to the harmony of the whole. No postern door was left—so she believed, at least—through which tempters or false prophets, religious or worldly, might enter in.

My readers know how Racine, a familiar guest both of the King and of Madame de Maintenon, was led to become the poet of this virginal retreat. It was thought desirable that the young girls should be "of their own time," that they should be acquainted with literary and historical subjects. They must be initiated into the art of speaking and writing correctly. Madame de Brinon shared these views, and composed poems and plays that the young pupils recited and performed when the unwilling doors of the Institute opened, perforce, to admit the Princesses. This literary outburst filled Madame de Maintenon with dismay. Its swelling compliments and pompous allegories appeared deplorable to her pure taste. She would have had the young girls act pieces which expressed none but the noblest sentiments, couched in the finest language. They studied and learned several of Racine's plays. But then another difficulty appeared. These children betrayed too much delight in the expression of the more passionate feelings; an unexpected flame would flash in the eyes of some young Britannicus, or Andromaque, or Oreste. The emotion of the noblest forms of love was finding its way into the Institute; but no love of any kind must find admittance there! The mind of the Instructress, puzzled as it was, still turned to Racine. She begged him to write a play for Saint-Cyr in which none but pure and religious sentiments should be expressed. Racine hung back. Out of conscientious scruples, he had ceased to write for the stage: his silence had been a noble form of penitence. The idea of stepping into Madame de Brinon's shoes, and turning himself into a convent poet for young ladies, held no temptation for him. But Madame de Maintenon pressed him hard, and he was himself so much attached to the young creatures that he consented at last, and taking up his harp once more, he made his way along those sacred paths—the only ones his repentant feet were willing now to tread—into the valley of Saint-Cyr.

And then the dwellers in that valley spent delightful days. Together Racine and Boileau, his counsellor, chose the Old Testament subject of Esther. Only children below the age of fifteen were allowed to act. These, it was declared, possessed "all the charm of childhood, without the seductions of youth." Mademoiselle de Lastic, who was to play the part of Ahasuerus, was lovely as the dawn; Mademoiselle de Glapion's golden voice delighted Racine; Mademoiselle de la Maisonfort, the little *chanoinesse*, who, like a walking elegy, wept angelic tears over the woes of Israel, was given the part of Elise. Once more a bold excursion into novelty was made, and Madame de Maintenon permitted Biblical costumes, Persian robes, fillets of pearls binding lovely loosened tresses. By degrees something of a feverish desire for finery awoke, and the youthful Queen of Assyria's floating mantle was embroidered with diamonds the King had worn when he danced ballets in days now long gone by. Finally, a stage was set up in one of the great dormitories, and on January 26, 1689, the King, accompanied by the Dauphin and several Bishops, came to taste the delicate banquet. He was delighted, for it was all beautiful, and with a natural beauty in which the subject of the poem, the lines, the fresh melodious voices and innocent gestures of the young performers mingled in one enchanting harmony. The choruses, especially, had a heavenly quality; the childish lips were only asked to sing what the young choristers could feel and comprehend, what their pious mistresses had taught them day by day.

The King expressed a wish to attend a fresh performance, once more accompanied by certain Bishops, and by eight Jesuit fathers. "To-day," said Madame de Maintenon, "we are acting for the saints." The "saints" were well pleased. Bossuet was there, grave and kindly. Fénelon, too, near the Duc de Bourgogne. The Duchesse de Bourgogne sat close to Madame de Maintenon, except when she would escape to roam the passages, or slip behind the curtain. Racine, who was behind the scenes, preparing the young performers, kindling their zeal, would steal away to avoid the spectators' plaudits, just because he so enjoyed them. One night they went in search of him, and found him kneeling in the chapel, striving to stifle the pride he had fancied slain for evermore.

After the children had acted for the "saints," there were performances, by the King's request, for the noblemen of the Court, for the Ministers, and then, one day, for the King and Queen of England. A childish entertainment, Racine tells us, became a subject of eager curiosity to the whole Court. Madame de Sévigné, and Madame de La Fayette, too, begged places for the play from their former friend. The repeated attendances of the King imparted a magnetic attraction to the festive scene. He was to be seen there, smiling, courteous, happy, looking like a kind shepherd in his own sheepfold. He never departed from his sovereign dignity, but he put away some of its state. He would leave his attendants in the vestibule or in the courtyards. When he entered the room in which the stage was placed, he would salute those who were present, and then, drawing the list of guests given him by Madame de Maintenon from his pocket, he would take up his position beside the entrance, put his cane across the doorway, and personally superintend the admission of the invited guests, softening the somewhat alarming supervision with a smile here and a word there. When the whole company was seated, he had the door closed, and would sometimes remain, himself, at the far end of the apartment, ready to receive a letter or despatch without attracting attention. Madame de Maintenon kept a little behind him, near enough to catch what he might say, and to whisper into his ear the admiring remarks that flew from row to row. Leaving the room, one evening, his eye fell on the witty countenance of Madame de Sévigné, as she sank in the deepest of curtseys into the swelling folds of her grey silk gown. The King halted, and said, "They tell me, Madame, that you are pleased!" "They" stood for Madame de Maintenon. And the Marquise flies to her writing-table, to share the scrap of honey brought back from the valley with her daughter—a smile, a bow, a word, from the King! Madame de La Fayette, to whom the King had not said a word, returned from the performance in a somewhat fretful mood, as always, saying, "People go there with an amount of eagerness that is incomprehensible!" But those who loved youth, poetry, religion, understood it very well.

Before long a shadow fell upon those bright young heads. Were these evening entertainments, the joy of the King, of the saints, of the dowagers, quite so good for the young girls themselves? They had a great desire to do better yet. The elder girls' voices were even sweeter than those of their juniors. They, too, pined to sing and declaim Racine's lines. Madame de Maintenon relented. She even went so far as to allow her own niece, Madame de Caylus, who had reached the age of seventeen, to play the part of Esther. The choruses were left to the younger girls, and their elders now appeared upon the boards, looking even more charming than their predecessors. But they were more impressionable too! Troubles sprang up, and jealousies. One day, Mademoiselle de la Maisonfort forgot her part, and Racine's patience failed him: "Here's a play spoilt!" he said; but a moment later he was drying the tears that fell from those great, sad eyes with his own handkerchief. After that tears became an every-day occurrence. And at last—what a flutter!—a note was discovered, sent by one of the pages to a youthful Israelite! The young ladies began to show signs of inattention to their lessons, between one performance and the next. The comparative importance enjoyed by those who had parts cast a certain shade of melancholy on those who had none. Madame de Maintenon grew uneasy, and above all, that very strict director, the Bishop of Chartres, evinced displeasure. The King bowed to his opinion, and sacrificed his own innocent amusement. No more Esther, no more Persian robes, no more Eastern fillets binding floating tresses! There must be an end of the harmony—religious, indeed, but so intoxicating—that Racine had created. Henceforth the young ladies were to know no garments but those fashioned out of harsh stuffs and druggets, and dark brown tammy. Their sole visitors were to be their own relations from the provinces: of the others, only the Duchesse de Bourgogne was to come back, and she as a pupil, subject to discipline; the pages of Esther were closed; the dull lesson-books, the tiresome histories, the grammars, the books of synonyms, were opened once more. In later days, indeed, there were performances of Athalie, but they were given in Madame de Maintenon's own room, behind closed doors. And those who saw the play thought it a wearisome affair.

The reform did not end here. Helped by her spiritual guides and by her friends, the Instructress examined her own conscience. She had been in too great a hurry. She had inculcated good principles into the minds of teachers who were too young for their work; but these principles had lacked the authority experience confers. She discovered that her young girls were beginning to talk like the *précieuses* of the old days, and she perceived that to give them a taste for fine talk would be a poor preparation for persons destined to lead retired lives in country manor-houses.

It was the same in every department. The vows of these Ladies of Saint-Louis, of which she had been so proud, were not free, either, from an alarming element. The worldly-minded, the feather-headed, among the Ladies might easily tire of the Institute, and go back into the world. The genuinely good and earnest might end by feeling unsettled in a place where the fumes of that outer world mingled with the smoke of the altar. They would begin to long for a cloistered life, and would seek the completion of their divine espousals in a regular nunnery.

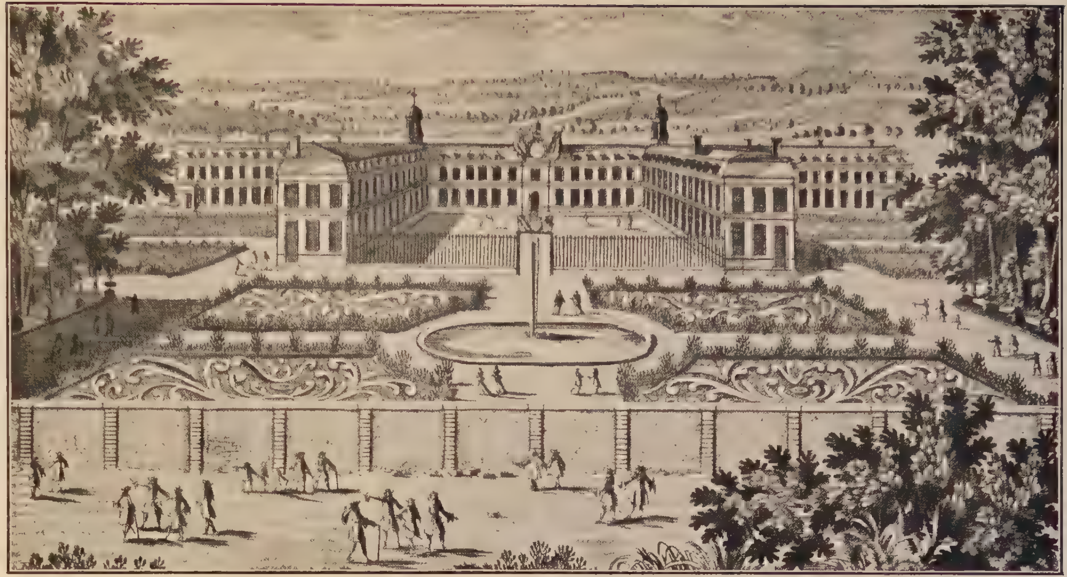
The Instructress began her work all over again. She shut herself up with the Bishop. Despotic as ever, he pressed his view that the Ladies of Saint-Louis ought to be nuns, pure and simple, bound to their duty and ideal by irrevocable vows. Manœuvres were going on at Rome to have the new Institute turned into a convent. The Pope had been far from pleased to see the birth of a community not destined to be under his jurisdiction, and of which the King was the Superior. He had been forced to accept the arrangement which devoted the revenue of the Abbey of Saint-Denis to the support of Saint-Cyr, but on that revenue he claimed a succession duty of a hundred and eighty thousand francs. A period of negotiation ensued; the Pope agreed to renounce his claim if the royal Founder would place the Institute in the hands of the Roman authorities, on the same terms as those affecting all other religious houses.

The King gave way. He gave way with great reluctance. The idea of the Institute had captivated him. But to set himself up as an educator of young ladies, against the will of the Pope and the authorities constituted by him, did not fall in with his views. A fresh start was made. And before the little girls were sent back to their tapestry work, the Ladies must be asked to go back to a fresh novitiate, and to surrender the liberty attached to the simple vows they had already taken. Madame de Maintenon called them together, and explained the Pope's wishes to them; she pointed out that she herself could not live for ever, that even then she was growing old, and that once she was gone, abuses still more dangerous than those she was seeking to avoid would certainly creep in, thanks to the freedom at present enjoyed. Neither would the King always be there to act as the faithful defender of the statutes he had drawn up with his own hand; and Saint-Cyr was too closely connected with Versailles to escape, in the long run, the dangers with which the vicinity of a court would certainly threaten a lay institution. Madame de La Fayette, with her prudish airs, had already openly foretold that the young gentlemen from Versailles, close by, would be sure to scale the walls of an establishment that was only half a cloister. Godet-des-Marais grew more and more urgent. The Ladies hung their heads. Some of them wavered, left the Institute. Others, preferring the known to the unknown, or following some secret attraction, departed, and knocked at the doors of old-established convents. The majority stayed on. And this time, to protect herself from going astray among fresh novelties, Madame de Maintenon brought in a real and saintly nun, Mother Priolo, Superioress of the Convent of the Visitation at Chaillot. The young Ladies of Saint-Cyr submitted themselves to the newcomer's will, and shut themselves up, with her, in those holy places of the soul wherein the saints had dwelt. Then Madame de Maintenon multiplied her activities. Now that the counsellor of her conscience had spoken, it seemed a less hard thing to her to remodel her whole undertaking, and if individuals must be sacrificed to ensure that object, she would do it unflinchingly. Madame de Brinon, it was quite clear, had overdone the part of the fashionable abbess at Saint-Cyr. There could be no question of sending her back into any novitiate. She had lately been seen, at Bourbon, whither, at her own request, she had gone to take the waters, accepting all the honours and compliments that were showered upon her. During the brilliant period at Saint-Cyr, her literary spirit had enjoyed a free rein; it was not likely, now, to accept the rule of seclusion. Did she argue the matter? Convent revolutions are noiseless affairs. A little garden gate in the depths of the valley opened one morning, outside it a coach stood waiting. The Ursuline entered the vehicle, and passed silently out of sight. Closeted with Madame de Maintenon, with her superiors, whose faithful friendship never left her, her sacrifice had been accomplished.

Then while the Ladies, like so many consecrated chrysalids, were accomplishing the time of their transformation, Madame de Maintenon carried on the work of instruction. At six o'clock in the morning she would start from Versailles, so as to be at Saint-Cyr when the children left their beds. She would go up to the dormitories, see the smaller girls get up, help them to brush their hair, and would then start the daily work in every department. She sent for "teaching sisters" to help her in that particular matter, but she kept the management of the class-rooms in her own hands, and applied her attention most particularly to the children's moral education. She would devote as long a period as three months to one particular class, "making it observe the order of each day, giving it general teaching," and would afterwards talk to each child apart. "There was a great deal of grace about her way of speaking," say the Ladies, "as in everything she did; her talk was lively, simple, natural, intelligent, insinuating, persuasive." The expression of her great serious eyes fascinated the children; with them she was in her element. In that grave task she found the brightness of her life. She grew merry, attractive, as she worked: for the first time, it may be, she was loved. No false flatteries nor secret dislikes assailed her on this path. In the early mornings, as she drove out of Versailles, her poor stood in rows along her road, stretching out their hands to her, greeting her with prayers and blessings as she passed. She would have her coach stopped. "It was always full," so Mademoiselle d'Aumale tells us, "of clothes or food; she would go into the cottages where sick people were lying, bringing them hippocras or rolls of soft bread." She always knew when and where a newly delivered mother lay near her road; she brought soup for the mother, and for her new-born babe garments that she had taught her children at Saint-Cyr to cut out and make. When the poor folk saw the lady in the dead-leaf-coloured cloak stop at their doors, they felt a sense of comfort at once, they said she "took the poison off their hearts." By the time she had reached Saint-Cyr, her heart was cheered already, and the things she had seen with those clear eyes of hers enabled her to teach her daughters better still that their true mission was not to be learned nor brilliant, but to be extremely temperate in their love of reading, to which they should always prefer the work they did with their own hands, their household cares, the duties of their condition in life. "It is infinitely more necessary for them," she would say, "to learn to behave like Christians, and rule their families wisely, than to play the learned lady or the heroine." These girls she was bringing up at Saint-Cyr were not intended for court life, nor for the witty jousts of fashionable *salons :* they were vowed to the laborious solitude which was the irrevocable fate of women destined to live out their lives in distant provinces, and in times that had been so closely preceded by long years of war. The best teaching they could receive was that which had its source in the divine spring of charity.

These were wise views. This time, Madame de Maintenon hoped, she was avoiding every danger for her daughters. The day came when the novices were allowed to take perpetual vows. Fénelon, the friend above all others of Saint-Cyr, was equally persuaded the safe path had been found. Racine! Fénelon! What delightful friends did the valley possess! At the beginning, the perfection of beauty only had been sought there, now the perfection of goodness was desired.

Among the novices who had gone back to the conventual training school under Mother Priolo's guidance, two, touched by a more lively grace, begged for leave to become Carmelite nuns. One only of the number went back into the world and married, a dowry of six thousand *livres* having been bestowed upon her by the Institute. Six of the Ladies, one after the other, and finally twelve of them, in all, swore fidelity to the new constitution as we see it set forth in a little book, now yellowed with age. This had been elaborated by Madame de Maintenon and the Bishop of Chartres, after much consideration, many alterations, and an endless exchange of letters, on the basis of the rule of the Augustine order. The King watched all these changes with a certain melancholy. He was glad, however, to hear that the dress of the establishment was to remain unaltered: that the Ladies of Saint-Louis, though they were to call each other "Sister," were to keep their family names—the French patronymics on which he set such store. The provision that released these new nuns from the duty of keeping the greater fasts, and from mortifications, also met with his approval. "The diligent attention necessary for teaching the classes and for the performance of their other duties," he said, "would furnish quite sufficient mortifications, if properly done." Though it was more reserved in its expression, the sovereign's care still kept so constant a watch over the new sheepfold that on the day of the nuns' profession the Abbé de Thiberge took for the text of his sermon the words *Erunt reges nutricii vestri et reginæ nutriciæ vestræ.* Having given out his text, he paused for a moment before translating it out of the Latin, and then he said, "Kings shall be appointed to nourish you, and the greatest of the land shall watch over your education." Thus did the preacher impart a discreet significance to his translation of the word *reginæ.* The King's visits continued, but he now came rather as a father who accepts the exceptional manner of life his daughter has embraced. He ceased to bring any attendants with him; he acted as a discreet adviser. He was received in the nuns' parlour only. Once there, he laid aside all ceremony, and with his perfect tact, his innate and consummate knowledge of what real politeness is, he played, to some extent, the part of a director, but he did it with great modesty. When he had given the Ladies a little lecture, he would sometimes say, "Ah! if I only could give as many lives to God as I have stolen from Him by my bad example!" And in that little whitewashed parlour he said again, to Mother de Beauvais, of a history written in the Latin tongue by the father of one of the nuns, "Latin, which I do not understand, for, as you know, I am but an ignorant fellow!" He would recognize among the nuns some whose mothers he had seen at Anne of Austria's Court, and turning to Madame de Maintenon he would say, in a smiling, teasing way, "After all, Madame, it seems to me that some good people have come out of that Court you scorn so much!" And Madame de Maintenon would answer with a curtsey and a smile. The King's remarks to the young novices were tinged with a still deeper shade of discretion. He was fond of repeating his favourite axiom, about "attaining to perfection in their state of life." He asked them not so much to be perfect in themselves as to be perfect nuns. He never lost his recollection of those angelic women of the Port Royal who had held the King of France in check and intrenched themselves, to carry on the struggle, in the perfection of their own lives, if not in that of their religious calling. On the occasion of one of these royal visits, the Mistress of the Novices having observed that it was very kind of the King to come, seeing he was well known not to care about seeing nuns, the King turned the remark off by saying briskly, "In all truth, I do not care about seeing those who run about the world, but I respect and honour all good nuns." He had no affection for those who ran about the world, nor for those, however perfect, who resisted him from behind their convent gratings. The vexatious memory of the Port Royal was clinging to him when he impressed the necessity for simplicity in their obedience on the novices. "A bad spirit," he would say, "alarms me everywhere." One day, when, after his wont, he had been advising the novices in his own refined and temperate way, Mother Marie-Constance, the Mistress of the Novices, offered him a blank sheet of paper, with the request, conveyed through Madame de Maintenon, that he would be pleased to write a few words upon it. With his own hand he wrote three words, embodying his favourite formula, "good behaviour, steadiness." For these daughters of God, these Ladies of Saint-Louis, who still remained under his protection, this was the true state of perfection, in his eyes.



View of Maison des Dames de Saint-Cyr

For immediately, and side by side with the reform which had sought to banish the spirit of the age from Saint-Cyr, yet another spirit, bringing with it a breath more dangerous still, had begun to hover over the valley. The outer doors of the little community were closed, now. Henceforward no Lady was to receive a visitor alone; another of her sisters was always to be present in the parlour, to listen to whatever was said. No more lively talk among themselves; the Ladies' conversation always turned, now, on how their prayers were to be said: perpetually they sought after the surest way by which they might enter into the only passion permitted them in future—the love of God. Love was Life. The fervour which had once found an external outlet was reduced to ferment inwardly. Here was a fresh peril! Suddenly a storm broke over the valley, a thunderbolt fell.

This was Madame de Maintenon's second blunder, and it is only right that her responsibilities should be left on her own shoulders. She herself, indeed, never made any difficulty about acknowledging them. If the dangerous religious attitude known as Quietism found its way into Saint-Cyr and led certain tender and delicate souls astray, it was Madame de Maintenon who brought it there, unknowingly and unintentionally. Following on that intelligent if somewhat worldly abbess, Madame de Brinon, the Institute now numbered among its inmates Madame de la Maisonfort, a woman of far subtler and more thoughtful mind. In her pupils she inspired a deep affection. "My star," Madame de la Maisonfort would say, "is to be loved!" Gifted with an extraordinary power of attraction, she stirred the young girls to enthusiasm by the novel and animated fashion in which she taught them history and the ancient myths. The nuns, too, loved this comrade, whose eager soaring heart longed to love God alone, and rose to meet His love even as a flower rises up towards the sunlight. She was to be seen, in chapel, buried in her prayers, her head bent low over her *prie-Dieu*. When she raised it her eyes were streaming with tears. Madame de Maintenon felt her charm, and recognized the bright vigour and lively influence of the youthful nun.

But in spite of all her perfect virtue, Madame de la Maisonfort, as a nun, had what may be called a bad, in other words, a forced, vocation. On her first arrival at Saint-Cyr, at the age of four-and-twenty, she had only been able to make up her mind to take simple vows after long and painful hesitation. Her soul was possessed by a dread of chains. Madame Guyon, who was her cousin, was in the habit of visiting her at Saint-Cyr, and inspired her, by her fervid letters, with a longing for God, a passionate love of prayer, in which the Lady of Saint-Louis strove to drown her fears. Helped, too, by Fénelon, Madame Guyon's friend, she gave way at last, and pronounced her simple vows. But when it came to taking the final vows, the struggle grew worse than ever. Her religious vocation was settled for her by her friends, at a council, called for her good, over which Fénelon presided, and at which Madame de Maintenon was present. When the verdict summoning Madame de la Maisonfort to the religious life had been pronounced, Fénelon himself went to announce it to his penitent, and found her on her knees, and in tears, before the altar. It took all his powers of persuasion to induce her to accept the decree that thus made her over to God. Madame de Maintenon had ardently desired this solution; she may even, though unconsciously, have suggested it to the council. Thus, on two separate occasions, had Madame de la Maisonfort bowed her head: first she had taken simple, and then the irrevocable vows. At Saint-Cyr the newly professed nun was hailed with an angelic delight. What work for good she would accomplish there! She looked a more religious figure than ever, under her black veil. The other nuns' directors had been chosen for their almost rustic simplicity, sons of Vincent de Paul, of the order of Saint-Lazare, but by a special privilege this tried soul remained under Fénelon's own care; she wrote to him, he came to see her. Madame Guyon had her own room at Saint-Cyr; the Ladies were always glad to see her arrive, with her large prominent eyes and her long face, pitted with smallpox, indeed, but so mobile and attractive. When she came, there were spiritual outpourings that filled the poor nun's soul with love. Madame de Maintenon encouraged the ladies' intercourse, and, herself under the charm of the mysticism overflowing with fervent love which characterized Fénelon's teachings, she bore her part in their conversations. Fénelon's letters to Madame de la Maisonfort were full of the idea of seeking God through love, and though Madame de Maintenon was incredulous enough concerning earthly love, she admitted the possibility, and the duty, of an immeasurable love of God. Madame Guyon sent Madame de la Maisonfort the books she had written. In them the recluse discovered a method of passive prayer that stilled the sickness of her soul; she laid down her own will: she left it all to God, and her pain was lulled to sleep. When she had thus cast herself upon God, she would seem to shine, as it were, with a holy joy. Madame de Maintenon noted this effect, and she, too, approved the books. When Madame Guyon sent her one entitled *Le Moyen court de faire Oraison*, the Instructress failed to detect anything more in it than an ardent appeal to the living strength of souls that were in love with God. And she carried it about in the pocket of her apron with another book of Madame Guyon's, *Les Torrents*.

What was the exact nature of the method that proved so captivating to many an angelic soul? Quietism drew its inspiration from the Gospel figures of Mary and Martha. Christ had said of that Mary who fell in adoration at the Saviour's feet, "She hath chosen the better part." The new quietists seized on the words, and took them for their motto. Madame Guyon taught her disciples to come into the presence of their Maker with hands empty of good works, to abandon themselves utterly to the pure love that despises all action, and casts away all hope of reward and fear of chastisement. Thus shall the quiet soul, withdrawn from life and action, rise as a passive offering to the Most High. Its freedom once attained, it soars on the wings of love, casts itself upon God, and is led by Him.

The pious nuns of Saint-Cyr would have been sorely astonished if anybody had told them that this doctrine was contrary to the moral teaching and discipline of their Church. Already there had been a strong movement against the dreary severity of the Jansenists. Was there to be an attack, now, on the holy freedom that was found in love? Where, then, was salvation to be discovered? Were not the lives of the saints themselves filled with the absorbing joys of mystic contemplation? Madame de la Maisonfort had forgotten the constraint which had caused her such bitter suffering, she was filled with wonder at the thought of her resistance in the days gone by. Madame de Maintenon loved Fénelon because he had healed Madame de la Maisonfort. She herself was no longer aware of that touch of " sad-heartedness " with which Fénelon had reproached her. In her turn, after a few hours spent alone with Madame Guyon, during which that lady, with her great eyes and her enchanting voice, had interpreted the meaning of the *Moyen court*, Madame de Maintenon was captivated. If the tiniest doubt had flashed upon her, she would still have accepted Fénelon's friendship and approbation as an all-sufficient guarantee.

But there were watchers beyond the walls of the Institute. Madame Guyon had disciples outside the convent boundaries, but her writings were perused by other persons also. These books were held to be strangely tinged with the terrible doctrines of that Spanish Jesuit Molinos, consigned by the Roman power to the prisons of the Inquisition. Bossuet had no affection for these prophetesses. His whole life had been spent in the fight against error. To his thinking, any error in theological principles entailed the most ruinous consequences for morality in general. What was this new doctrine? he inquired. Whither would it lead? What was the meaning of this return to nature, whereby man ceased to be a sinner condemned to unending effort to cleanse himself from stain, and became the free child of God, dwelling in a mystic Eden?

His luminous mind searched out the depths of Madame

Guyon's life and writings. Her life, at all events, had been a strange one; there were suspicious points about it. As for her writings, he tried them by the light of a sturdy logic. Madame Guyon's powers of fascination, her evasive and supple charm, produced no effect upon the Bishop. He sounded the alarm. He spoke, gently, in the first instance, to the small circle of devout ladies at Versailles who had allowed themselves to fall under the spell of this doctrine of love: to the Duchesse de Beauvilliers, her sisters the Duchesse de Chevreuse and the Marquise de Mortemart, Madame de Dangeau, Madame de Maintenon's close friend, and Madame de Maintenon herself. Bossuet's warning astounded the little coterie. Its members were well aware of Fénelon's liking for Madame Guyon and her books. They had a deep affection for Monseigneur de Cambrai. It was for Madame de Beauvilliers' eight daughters that he had written his *Traité sur l'éducation*. Between him and Madame de Maintenon a close alliance existed. Fénelon was with them morning, noon and night; leaning, of an evening, against the white marble chimneypiece in Madame de Beauvilliers' *salon*, he would hold forth upon the doctrine, and his absolute purity of soul brought courage to his hearers. There was too little liberty, too little fervour, in the cold and splendid atmosphere of Versailles. This new glow shed warmth on every heart.

At Saint-Cyr, too, watch was kept. It was through the nuns' confessions that the Fathers of Saint-Lazare first noted a mention of this pure love, and with it, some discussion of the religious rule. They recognized the slight ferment of excitement that was beginning to disturb their penitents' pure souls. Thanks to her special privilege, Madame de la Maisonfort slipped through their fingers; but they requested that the manuscripts and letters the effects of which they had remarked should be communicated to them. They confiscated *Les Torrents*, *Le Moyen court*, and a commentary on the Song of Songs. They notified the stern Bishop of Chartres. He arrived forthwith, to investigate the matter on his own account. It was as though the doctors responsible for the health of the Community had reported their discovery of a terrifying plague. Closeted with Madame de Maintenon, Godet-des-Marais confided his anxieties to her: a poison was at work in the Institute. Madame de Maintenon was amazed. Instantly she drew out a little book she always carried in her pocket—*Le Moyen court*—and, greatly moved, she threw it on the table, accusing herself of ignorance and weakness. She had not perceived how far the doctrine of pure love might lead its followers on the road to laxity.

And then the Bishop of Chartres proceeded to denounce the ruinous consequences of the doctrine from his cathedral pulpit. He refused to admit the possible existence of doctrines and practices that might be harmful to dwellers in the outside world and pure for those who dwelt close to the altar. Might a worldly man live in sin and yet hold himself absolved if he still loved God with a lively love? This was the extreme, the terrifying outcome! Madame de Maintenon was thunderstruck. Her mind was made up instantly. At Saint-Cyr the nuns disputed the theory. There was no doubt, they said, that the consequences deduced from the doctrine were hateful, but the deduction itself was erroneous. To them this pure love meant life: was their life to be taken from them? Did not God prefer liberty in love to the constraint of penitence? Fénelon, for his part, began audibly to declare that he " would answer for Madame Guyon's intentions," and his heart began to rage within his breast.

Yet he it was who requested Bousset to make an " official " inquiry into the doctrine. He begged Madame Guyon to betake herself to Meaux and put herself into the Bishop's hands. She went, and shut herself up in the Convent of the Visitation. She was supple, subtle, as ever, submitting herself beforehand to whatever verdict was pronounced, protesting her fidelity to the Church. Between her conferences with the Bishop, she wrote her own life. Bossuet read it all. From the Song of Songs, from those shifting *Torrents*, from her anthems and her transports, he evolved thirty-four items of accusation, all of them perfectly clear and as perfectly blameworthy; the theory of pure love was opposed, by its consequences, to the moral discipline of the Church. Fénelon signed the document that condemned his friend "out of deference," so he said, "rather than from conviction."

Then the same thing as had already occurred in connection with the Jansenist business came to pass. Nobody contested the harmfulness of the items that had been condemned, but Madame Guyon's disciples continued to maintain that those tiny drops of poison had never run in the clear waters of the *Torrents*. "I, who know her well," said Fénelon, "will answer for the purity of her heart and her intentions." Certain docile souls at Saint-Cyr accepted the sentence and returned to the regular traditions. Madame de Maintenon, all the more energetic because she realized her own blunder, was the resolute leader of this faithful section. There was a party of resistance as well. Madame de la Maisonfort could not resign herself to the condemnation of that which had lifted her out of her misery. She did detest the thirty-four items, indeed, but her love for Madame Guyon remained unchanged. Her friend sent her letters filled with a gentle martyrdom that suffered for the truth. And secretly, through Madame de la Maisonfort, Madame Guyon continued to wield her occult influence. To Fénelon, so long as Rome had not spoken, the question, though settled by the ecclesiastical inquiry as far as the laity was concerned, remained unsolved. He still felt himself entitled to defend the extraordinary woman in whom he believed himself to have discerned a divine influence. He had long private interviews with Madame de Maintenon at Saint-Cyr. Her wish would have been that all the friends should have unanimously agreed upon the removal of the suspect. "I have seen our friend," she writes. "We disputed together, but very gently. I wish I were as faithful to my duties as he is to his friend; he does not lose sight of her: nothing shakes his faith in her."

Fénelon was at work, seeking his arguments in the history of the heroes of the Church. Quickly he completed his little book, *Les Maximes des Saints en état d'oraison*, which depicted his friend as belonging to that phalanx of mystics who had astonished, and at moments scandalized, the world and the Church, and yet, as the Church herself confessed, had triumphed in the end.

The argument was ingenious, and Fénelon's good faith perfect. Bossuet's statement that Fénelon's "very purity" was his pitfall is an acknowledgment of that. The valley was now threatened by a real danger. Twice over did Bossuet, in response to Madame de Maintenon's prayer, visit Saint-Cyr. Seated in the nuns' parlour, with the whole community gathered round him, he gave the quietists the true definition of love, and afterwards reasoned in private with those who refused to yield, and would betake themselves neither to prayer nor to repentance. He had a conversation with Madame de la Maisonfort, and gave her leave to lay her difficulties before him in writing. A correspondence ensued, in the course of which the nun took refuge in angelic subtleties of argument. The dialogue has been handed down to us: a colloquy between two archangels discussing the manner of love most worthy to celebrate the glory of their Creator. Bossuet poured into his letters the wisdom, unchanging as the stars, of a mind that cannot conceive a love not bound by rule and order. But for the personal matter involved, Madame de la Maisonfort would have accepted her defeat; but no more than Fénelon would have let himself be persuaded to doubt Madame Guyon would Madame de la Maisonfort allow herself to be persuaded that Fénelon, her saviour, was in fault.

Meanwhile the Community of Saint-Cyr waited on its knees. Bossuet had carried the dispute to Rome. Madame de Maintenon may still have nursed some hope. Around her perplexity reigned everywhere. The King, offended by the thought that one of the religious quarrels he detested had broken out close to him, almost in his own home, and spread, and set disagreement between the two prelates he had trusted above all their fellows—confiding the Dauphin to one, and the Duc de Bourgogne to the other—was vexed to see Fénelon more sensitive to the sufferings of the people than to the glory of the kingdom, and more in love with the freedom of human hearts than with the doctrines taught by the authority of the Church. He was heard to say, in his vexation, " He has the most fanciful mind of any man in my kingdom ! " He awaited the verdict of Rome with a certain feeling of distrust. The idea that the Dauphin's tutor might be censured by the Pope was excessively disagreeable to him. The Duc de Bourgogne was waiting too, and with a quivering heart. Fénelon's faithful female adorers, the Duchesse de Beauvilliers, the Duchesse de Chevreuse, Madame de Dangeau, Madame de Maintenon, spent their time in prayer. The Instructress of Saint-Cyr stifled her anxiety in silence ; filled with sad forebodings, she watched Madame de la Maisonfort going about pale and tense-looking, full of mute resistance. Bossuet and Fénelon both had their defenders. Bossuet, full of harsh austerity, wrote denunciations of the ruinous illusion under which Fénelon laboured, to his thinking, when he allowed himself to be deceived by " that woman." And " that woman," as he spoke the words, sounded like " the serpent " in Holy Writ.

" That woman " was sent to the Bastille. She entered her purgatory with the proud gentleness of a conscious victim of persecution. Rome pronounced sentence on her, and on Fénelon as well, but with a certain mildness—by brief, not by bull. " I send Your Grace the lion's skin over which there has been so great a roaring for the last twenty months ! " so ran the letter despatched from Rome to the Cardinal de Noailles with the Pontifical decree. Saint-Cyr was thunderstruck ; nothing that hurt Fénelon could fail to hurt Saint-Cyr, and that most cruelly. This was a question of parting not only with the books that were so dear, but with the teachers that were so beloved.

At Versailles the King, who disliked receiving lectures from the Pope, felt a sense of injury. Fénelon, the Institute, Madame de Maintenon ! This verdict of the Pope's touched him on the raw. He said to the Duc de Bourgogne, " Monseigneur de Cambrai's doctrine is condemned ! " " That which he has taught me will never be in that case ! " the Prince quickly replied. His words grated upon the King. As a Christian he distrusted inspired persons, as a King he loathed them. Further, the existence of a hidden power which gives certain persons the mastery over others, and which was Fénelon's to the highest degree, was an offence to him. All the internal struggles in the kingdom which he had carried on with so much difficulty and so very little glory had been religious struggles. He had never really vanquished either the Protestants or the Jansenists. Half-stifled fires were still smouldering in the depths of some men's souls. And now here was a fresh threat of trouble with sectarians, not in the provinces, this time, not in obscure religious houses, but in the very refuge where he had believed himself to be breathing, with his children, a purer air—in that very room of Madame de Maintenon's where the monarch's wife, who professed scorn for the Court, had won freedom, thanks to his confidence and love, for all her undertakings !

Then a genuine crisis in the relations between the King and Madame de Maintenon did really come into existence. Madame de Maintenon was too honest to deny her share in the error and its propagation. She had brought Madame Guyon to Saint-Cyr, and entertained her there out of affection and partiality for Madame de la Maisonfort; she herself had found pleasure in the books written by the lady now described by the King as " the greatest mad woman in my kingdom." She had been attached to Fénelon, she had confided the souls of the dwellers at Saint-Cyr to her valued friend's care, she had admired his intelligence, his novel views, his pursuit after that mighty love which was able to embrace the splendour of the Deity and the humility of the lowest beings, all at once. No more was Louis XIV heard to say, " I am an ignorant fellow ! " It had suited his purpose, at one time, to lay aside his majesty while he sat among his children. Now with coldness and severity written on his countenance, he manifested his displeasure. With his own hand he signed the order that desired Madame de la Maisonfort to leave Saint-Cyr and enter a convent, there to bring her " reveries " to a close. As in Madame de Brinon's case, the expulsion was carried out in secret. Once more a coach halted before the garden gate, and carried away the charming and unhappy creature with her " dangerous mind." Many tears were shed when her departure was known to the nuns. Seeing their sorrow, Madame de Maintenon said to them, " You will never weep for her as much as I have wept, ever since I saw it must come to this ! " She herself shed bitter tears. For her, all this spelt defeat. Yes, she had erred ; and now suffering and irritation ringed her round. The saintly Françoise, with her royal ermine falling over her coarse gown, had dropped, in the King's eyes, to the level of a suspected bigot ! She bore it all with her usual quiet patience. Sometimes her women would hear her sobbing all night long. " Never," she was to tell her daughters, later, " was I so close to disgrace ! " And the disgrace was falling on those she had loved and trusted. Fénelon received orders to retire to Cambrai. That meant the dispersion of the circle of friends. Those who were known henceforward as " the little flock " lived on the fervour and the love Fénelon had left behind him. As for Madame de Maintenon, she devoted her life to healing her daughters' wounds. At early dawn she might be seen leaving her coach at Saint-Cyr, going into the chapel, first of all, and then up to the class-rooms. She poured out her heart in confidential conversations with the nuns, and acknowledged her imprudence to her daughters. They had sore reasons for regret and tears, but all that lay in the past, and now they must turn the page. Was any one infallible ? By degrees a return was made to the austere guidance of the Lazarist fathers, of the meticulous-minded Bishop of Chartres, to a teaching that had once seemed commonplace, to good works, to the modest labour of teaching the classes. All Madame de Maintenon's talk now was of simplicity, of obedience ; she forbade all scraps of writing ; there was to be no independent expression. Slowly she recovered the King's confidence. The Bishop of Chartres came to her assistance.

Among Madame de Maintenon's papers at Saint-Cyr, a letter addressed to Louis XIV by the Bishop was found after her death. " Give back your confidence," it runs, " to that excellent partner, filled with the spirit of God, and with tenderness and fidelity to your person. I know the depths of her heart, and I will pledge you my word that no one can love you more tenderly and respectfully than she loves you. She will never deceive you, unless she is deceived herself."

Unless she is deceived herself ! It was at once an acknowledgment and an excuse. The storm was dying down. At Cambrai, Fénelon was setting a great example, astounding the Church herself by the serene perfection of his obedience, devoting himself to the care of his See and to the affection of his good Flemings, who worshipped him. In a charge to the Bishops of his diocese, read out from every pulpit, he repudiated his own book. The phlegmatic parishioners of the Cambrai churches looked on in astonishment while the public executioner consigned their beloved Archbishop's treatise to the flames. Fénelon caused a monstrance to be engraved with a figure of an angel trampling on two books, Calvin's *Institutions*, and his own *Maximes*. Was this a sort of ostentation in obedience, on his part, cloaking a reservation of his soul's appeal to God against his judges?

Posterity is still touched by his purity, with its mingled fidelity and tenderness. He still steals our hearts. His obedience is as great an example to us as his infallibility could have been, and less difficult to follow. Much blame has been laid on the " deplorable weakness " with which Madame de Maintenon left Fénelon to his fate; but the tempest had grown too strong for her, her own roots were sorely shaken. Everybody gave way. Fénelon made his own act of abnegation, and in that renunciation the friends were once more united.

Madame de Maintenon wore herself out with weeping till the day when Louis XIV, moved himself, said, as he sat beside her bed, " Madame, are you going to die of this business? "

CHAPTER X

SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE—THE REFORM OF GOMERFONTAINE

Madame de Maintenon the spiritual Superioress of Saint-Cyr—Her life at Versailles—The salvation of the King's soul—A Lady of Saint-Cyr appointed Abbess of Gomerfontaine—Madame de Maintenon's advice.

THANKS to her encouragement of intellectual culture, Madame de Maintenon had very nearly ended by creating a set of *précieuses ;* thanks to her subsequent attempt to attain the liberty of a divine love, she had only just failed to create rebellious angels. Education and reforms were difficult undertakings, that much was clear ! She was fain to repudiate her own actions, to recognize the fact that there was no short means of finding one's way into the deep waters of the soul's hidden life.

Bravely she set to work again. She was already Superioress of Saint-Cyr, regularly appointed to her office, and confirmed in it, by ecclesiastical authority. The doors of the convent, closed, after the first reforms, to all worldly visitors, were now shut even against the pious friends outside its walls. "I have always been disappointed," she said sadly, "in the persons I have received from saintly hands!" Her adventure (if we may use the word) with Fénelon weighed on her mind and heart. "You know," she was to say a few years later, "that I looked upon him as a saint. It was for this reason that I filled the house with his books." Fénelon, at Cambrai, was proving that he was a real Saint; as Monseigneur de Chartres said, he was Arius personified, waging war on Arianism. But once, just for a day, he had been Arius! In whom, then, was she to put her trust, in future?

In the conventual rule, in her work, in study, in the ancient methods verified by the Church. They would go back to the old and accepted texts: The Imitation, the Acts of the Apostles, the Psalms, the Office of the Virgin—all the doctrines, all the mystic teachings, were to be found in them. No personal comment, no exceptional method, would be permitted. The divine flame was not easily regulated; under constraint, it glimmered down into lukewarmness; left at liberty, it blazed into a conflagration.

Madame de Maintenon still adhered to her old dislike of convents; constantly she would hold forth about the "silliness of indiscreet nuns, devoted to mystery and intrigue, self-seeking, flatterers, falling into raptures over a prince's very name." Novelties must be avoided, now, and so must foolish old-fashioned ideas. The persons she had to deal with were gentle souls, and loved her well. Thanks to the evident superiority conferred by her great position, her age, and her intelligence, she met with very little opposition; she knew relief at last, and now and then she even tasted joy. She had reached her sixty-fifth year. To her girls, she was like a youthful comrade; she took pleasure in the sparkling merriment of her novices; she laid a tender touch on the melancholy of the elder nuns. She felt a mother's heart within her; she had endured a mother's trials. She loved, she spent herself for others. During an absence from Saint-Cyr she wrote, "I am counting the days of our separation. Ten of them are over, but there are more than that to come." And another day, "When I am with you, and we are taking counsel together, or I am talking to one of you, I feel, so to speak, as though there were not any Court; and thus I breathe a little!"

She had certain favourites among her daughters—those who entered Saint-Cyr with pure and gentle hearts, a native refinement of mind, intellectual gifts, and a quivering tenderness of feeling. Such had Madame de la Maisonfort been; such was Madame de Glapion—a tender, melancholy being, who never could attain to that detachment from all human creatures on which the occasionally inhuman calm of certain nuns is based. Madame de Glapion's restless melancholy found an echo in Madame de Maintenon's heart, heavy-heartedness was her temptation, too. She fought against it for herself, and for this daughter of her love, whom she understood as no other person could. "You look like a soul in purgatory!" she would say, and carry her off to her own room, to reason with her and strengthen her; this was what she called "talking to somebody." By these talks she shaped her hearers' souls. When smallpox broke out at Saint-Cyr, the duty of shutting herself up with the stricken pupils fell on Madame de Glapion, who was Headmistress in charge of all the classes. It was a painful experience. Within a few days twelve young girls succumbed. The sight of all this death disquieted Madame de Glapion. She sent Madame de Maintenon little notes describing the distress the terrible struggle was costing her. "Our affliction is as great as yours," wrote Madame de Maintenon in reply, "but we have the consolation of being able to weep and pray together, and God is not pleased to grant you that. Accept, then, that which is His pleasure. He has shown you death close to you, so that you may grow used to facing it. That of our children has affected you; you will lose many persons who are dear to you, yet, and you will die yourself, at last!" Two days later Madame de Maintenon writes once more to the nun, who has been refusing her food. "Eat, my daughter, what is sent you; obedience is better than sacrifice. Take care of yourself; that is God's will. Come to the surgery at half-past one; I shall be there to kiss you. But come full of courage, and let us think of nothing but to strengthen one another, so that we may do better work than ever!"

Madame de Glapion did come to the surgery, and received the embraces of this Roman mother. But once her trial was ended, she grew thin, and seemed to waste away; the dying girls over whom she had watched were never absent from her sight. "There is nothing I would not do to comfort you, my dear daughter," wrote Madame de Maintenon, "yet I am going to scold you; your affliction is not reasonable, and it is very unlike the remainder of your conduct. I cannot tell you the distress it causes me, and it is impossible that God should be pleased with you. He is a jealous God, and does not desire to see such attachment to any earthly creature, in any spouse of His!" Yet she herself was touched; she felt tenderly towards the young creature, so easily moved to tears. Perhaps she detected, in Madame de Glapion's case, one of those uncertain vocations doomed to such bitter suffering in the cloistered life. It is certain, at any rate, that Madame de Glapion sometimes felt a homesick longing for the world she had forsaken. Checked in her reading by the severe regulations now imposed on the community of Saint-Cyr, she turned with pleasure to the charms of music; but before long it was noticed, in the course of the religious offices, that her beautiful voice rang out, from time to time, with an accent that was too human; still, in every temptation that assailed her, her young and tender confidence in her "Abbess" stood her in good stead. Madame de Maintenon was never weary of listening to her confidences; in them she recognized all the contradictions of our human life. The woman whose experience of the world had been so sad, and the nun who regretted a world she had never known, exchanged their inmost thoughts. To rid her daughter of regret for a life she herself judged so severely, Madame de Maintenon went so far as to tell Madame de Glapion something of the terrible weariness that weighed on her own existence at Versailles. She would describe the discomforts and the toilsome slavery of a place which looked, from a distance, like a very temple of grandeur. It was a pleasure to her to pour out the story; from her high estate, the young nun's Superioress, her "spiritual guide," stepped down to play the friend who tells the tale of her own woes. So great was the affection born of these mutual effusions, that when Madame de Maintenon had to leave Saint-Cyr, and follow the King to Mons, she avoided all farewells: "I dared not say anything to her," she wrote, "for fear of emotion on her part and my own." And the next day, not venturing to write directly, even then, because of her own emotion, she sends her a message, "We are frozen, covered with mud, tired out, and saddened too, for my part, at seeing myself parted for so long a time from my dear daughters, in whose company I find all that is good."

One of these conversations has been preserved to us by Madame de Glapion's own pen. In its course, Madame de Maintenon describes, from her own point of view, what Saint Simon has called the "mechanism" of her life at Court. Let us listen to the two voices.

"'I was thinking this morning,' said Madame de Glapion, 'as I watched you receiving the sacrament, that perhaps it was a long time since you had had a morning like that one, during which you were able to say your prayers in comfort.'

"'That is true,' replied Madame de Maintenon, 'and I have often told you that I have to take the time for my prayers and for my Mass while everybody else is asleep, and but for that I could not get to Mass, for once people begin to come into my room I cannot reckon on being my own mistress any more: I do not have another moment to myself.'

"Then I told her that I fancied her room as being like one of those great shops that are never empty, once they are opened, and in which the owners are obliged to stay all the day long.

"'Indeed, it is just like that,' said Madame. 'They begin to come into my room at about half-past seven. First of all it is Monsieur Maréchal (the King's first surgeon). He is hardly gone out of the room when Monsieur Fagon comes in; he is followed by Monsieur Bloin, or some other person sent to enquire how I am. Sometimes I have extremely urgent letters which I am obliged, by sheer necessity, to put aside. Then come the more important people: one day it will be Monsieur Chamillard, another it will be the Archbishop; to-day, some general just departing to the armies, to-morrow some audience I am obliged to give, and that has been specially asked for, with this peculiarity, that these are almost always persons whom I cannot put off seeing, for of course it must be done in the case, for instance, of officers just going away, and so with others. The other day Monsieur le Duc du Maine waited in my ante-chamber till Monsieur Chamillard had finished what he had to say. When he left, Monsieur le Duc du Maine came in, and he kept me till the King arrived—for there is one little comfort about that, which is that they do not leave my room till they are turned out by the arrival of a person of higher rank. Once the King comes, they have to go. The King stays with me till he goes to Mass. I do not know if you have remarked that in the midst of all this I am not yet dressed. If I were, I should not have had time to say my prayers. So I am still in my night-cap. All this time my room is like a church, with people passing through it like a procession; everybody comes through, and there is a perpetual coming and going.

"'When the King has heard Mass, he comes back to my room; afterwards the Duchesse de Bourgogne comes, with a number of ladies, and they remain while I dine. It would seem as if that time, at all events, might be spent for myself; but you will soon see what really happens. I am anxious to know whether the Duchesse de Bourgogne is doing anything unsuitable, whether she is treating her husband properly; I try to make her say a word to this lady, to see whether she is behaving with kindness to that other. I have to talk to all the company, and contrive to bring them all together. If anybody commits an indiscretion, I feel it. I am embarrassed by the manner in which people take up what is said; in short, I am in a state of mental disturbance than which nothing can be worse. I am hemmed in so closely by a circle of ladies that I cannot ask for anything to drink. Sometimes I turn round and say, looking at them, "You do me great honour, yet I really should like to have a serving man." When I say that, every one of the ladies wants to wait on me, and hurries to fetch me whatever I may want, which involves me in another sort of discomfort and inconvenience.

"'At last they go away to dinner—for I dine at noon with Madame d'Heudicourt and Madame de Dangeau, who are not in good health. So I am left alone with them, at last; everybody departs. If ever there was a day during which I might amuse myself for a moment, it would be now, either by talking, or playing a game of backgammon. But Monseigneur generally chooses just that time to come and see me, one day because he is not going to his dinner, and another because he has dined early before he goes out hunting. So after all the others, he arrives; he is the most difficult man in the whole world to entertain, yet entertain him I must, for I am in my own house. If it were to happen in another person's house I should only have to sit myself down on a chair and say nothing at all, if I chose; the ladies with me can do that if they please, but I, who am in my own room, must make myself agreeable, I must find something to say; that is not particularly delightful. After that we leave the table. The King and all the Princesses and the Royal Family come into my room, and bring the most tremendous heat with them. We talk, and the King stays about half an hour; then he goes away, but nobody goes except him; all the rest of them are still there, and as the King is no longer present they all draw closer to me. They gather all round me, and there I have to stay, and listen to the jests of Madame la Maréchale de C——, to one person's joke, to another's story; none of these good ladies have anything to do, their complexions are quite fresh, and they have idled their whole morning away. But in my case things are very different, for I have other things to do beside making conversation, and very often my heart is heavy over some trouble, some bad news—the attack that was to be made on Verrue, some little time ago, for instance; all that is on my mind; I keep thinking there may be a thousand persons perishing, at that very moment, and others in suffering, as well.'

"Here I interrupted Madame, by saying to her, 'I was thinking just now, Madame, that at all events this mass of occupations and business brought you one advantage, which is that as they follow close upon each other's heels, you have no time to brood over those that cause you affliction.'

"'It would seem so,' added Madame, 'but that does not prevent me from thinking about them, and carrying a perpetual burden on my heart that pervades my whole being, and in spite of which I am obliged to laugh. That seems a very painful thing to me.

"'But to come to the end of my day. When they have stayed some time longer, each person retires to his or her own apartment, and then do you know what happens? One of these ladies is sure to stay behind, because she wants to speak to me in private. She takes me by the hand, and leads me into my little room, frequently only to tell me a number of unpleasant and very tiresome things. One has had a disagreement with her husband, another wants the King to do something for her, and I have to listen to it all, and the lady who has no love for me does not allow that to restrain her more than any other. I look on myself as an instrument that God uses for the good of others. Ah! How happy a thing it is to leave it all to Him, to give oneself up to Him, to live on from day to day, doing all the good one can!

"When the King comes in from hunting, he returns to me again; the door is shut, and nobody else comes in. Then I am alone with him. I have to endure his sorrows with him, if he has any, his depressions, his nerves; sometimes he has a fit of crying that he cannot control, sometimes he is not well. He has no conversation. Often some Minister will bring him bad news; the King will sit down to business. If he wishes me to make a third in this council, he calls me; if I am not wanted, I withdraw to a little distance, and at that moment I often say my afternoon prayers. I pray for about half an hour. Though the King may wish me to hear what is said, I cannot do anything at all. I learn sometimes, in this way, that things are not going well; some courier may come in with bad news. All that weighs on my heart, and prevents me from sleeping at night.

"While the King is transacting his business, I sup. But I am not able to do it in comfort oftener than once in two months. I know the King is all alone, or that he was depressed when I left him; or else, when Monsieur Chamillard has nearly finished, the King will send to beg I will make haste. Another time he will want to show me something, so that I am always in a hurry, and then I can only think of one thing—to eat quickly. I have my fruit brought up with my meat, so that I may make more haste. I leave Madame d'Heudicourt and Madame de Dangeau at table, because they cannot do as I do, and sometimes it makes me ill myself.

"After all that, it has grown late, as you will imagine. I have been up since six o'clock in the morning, I have not been able to breathe freely the whole day long, I have fits of weariness and yawning, and, above all, I begin to feel the effects of age; I end by being so tired that the King will sometimes notice it, and say, 'You are very weary, are you not? You ought to go to bed!' So I go to bed, my women come to undress me, but I feel the King wants to speak to me, that he is waiting for them to go, or else some one of the Ministers is there, and he is afraid he might hear. That worries him and me too. What am I to do? I hurry till I almost faint away—and you must know that all my life long I have hated to be hurried. At last, there I am in my bed. I dismiss my women; the King comes and sits beside me. Try to think what I feel like there! I am in my bed, that is true, but I should really stand in need of several things, for I am not of a naturally costive habit. There is nobody present whom I can ask for what I want. Sometimes I should be glad to have towels heated for me, but there is no waiting-woman at hand. It is not that I could not have one, for the King is full of kindness, and if he thought I wished for one he would endure my having even ten; but it does not strike him that I am doing myself any violence. As he has always been master wherever he goes, and always does just as he pleases, he never dreams that anybody is different from himself, and he believes that if I do not have one it is because I have no wish for one. You know my maxim is to keep a curb on oneself and think of others. The great ones of the earth are not generally like that; they never place any restraint upon themselves, and it does not even occur to them that others do it on their account; and they are not obliged to them for doing it, because they are so accustomed to seeing everything done to suit them that the fact does not strike them, and is not even noticed by them. It has happened to me, when I have had one of my terrible colds, to be almost strangled by the cough, without being able to give myself any relief. Monsieur de Pontchartrain, seeing me perfectly crimson, exclaimed to the King, 'But she cannot go on like this! Somebody must be called!'

"The King remains with me till he goes to his supper, and before the King sups, Monseigneur the Dauphin, the Duc de Bourgogne, and the Duchesse de Bourgogne all come to see me. At ten o'clock, or a quarter after ten, everybody departs; I am alone at last, and I take the relief I need. But often the anxieties and fatigue of the day prevent me from sleeping."

Such was her picture of this "mechanism." Its grinding noise was calculated to fill Madame de Glapion's soul with terror. Listening to the story thus confided to her, the nun felt her vocation grow stronger within her. The century itself had told her the story of its vanities, its miseries, the weariness that hung over all its riches and its splendours. The prestige of the great ones of society faded from her sight; the King himself became no more than a man, subject, like any other man, to fits of tears, bowed down with anxiety, "devoid of conversation"! Once again she realized the sweetness of the celestial harmonies. In chapel, during the holy offices, her beautiful voice grew steadier, her prayers more concentrated, and her spiritual guide wrote her the following words: "You are right to love your prayers and the Office. I hardly ever see you so employed without regretting that I myself am not a nun."

She regretted she was not a nun! These are unexpected words on the lips of the woman who preferred Scarron to the convent. But she was not unwilling to let it be understood that an element of sacrifice was associated with her great position—a noble pride, but pride it was. She would rattle the gilded fetters that chained her to Versailles. "Do you not realize," she wrote, "that I am dying of melancholy in a situation it is not easy to imagine, and that it is only the help of God that prevents me from perishing?"

Though certain affinities between their natures had brought about a special intimacy between Madame de Glapion and herself, the same relations existed—in a minor degree, but they did exist—between the Foundress and each of her daughters. Severity, even of the most uncompromising kind, in her counsels as to the attainment of perfection; gentleness, kindliness, affection, in her everyday dealings—this was her method. A continual interchange of letters between Versailles and Saint-Cyr enabled the daughters to set forth their difficulties, their faults, their failures. The Mother's replies brought fresh strength to one, set another on her feet once more. With the Lady Superiors of the convent, who were changed every three years, she discussed the government of the nuns' souls and the administration of the convent revenues. She inspired the class-mistresses with a genuine love of childhood. She wrote tender and mystic letters to the young novices, and familiar epistles to lay sisters, grown lukewarm in their dull duties. And when she came to Saint-Cyr in person, she completed the work her letters had begun by private talks and homely speeches. "I preach!" she would say with a smile, and her daughters would set her teachings down in their thick books; they were filled with the conviction that a great work was in process of accomplishment, and that the lessons of this golden age must be preserved to the Institute. The letters, too, were copied; though she had forbidden all manuscripts, Madame de Maintenon winked at this infraction of her rule. She even revised the copies, and would sometimes correct the original expression of her thought; the same course was followed with regard to personal conversations, and the homilies she "preached." Her daughters preserved everything. The years were rolling by, Madame (she was always called "Madame") would not be there always. Her health had grown delicate, she was extremely thin, often she would reach Saint-Cyr so exhausted that she had to go to bed; then, from beneath her red damask curtains, she would speak to her children in a weak faint voice; she would say: "One of these days you will hear I am dead; you must learn to do without me, and not grow wild." She liked to think that when she had disappeared from sight her spirit would live on in the archives of Saint-Cyr. When she was not able to see her daughters, she would write them playful notes as she lay in bed.

As life in the valley became more and more ascetic, the old lady's heart grew younger and more cheerful. Witticisms entertained her now, and even little playful jokes about the small peculiarities that had withstood the meticulous action of a life of virtue. Sometimes the nuns would write her a collective letter, each of them contributing a few lines signed with her own name. "Madame" always chose the day on which she had one of her headaches to write her reply; she would answer every person, and address each by her own name. She had been determined the sheepfold should be safely closed, but once she felt there was no danger to be feared from ravening wolves, a certain versatility of mind, a touch of merriment, caused her no alarm. She would plan whole days of recreation, and come from Versailles to spend them with her daughters. On these occasions, no alteration was made in the daily duties, lay or religious, but in the hours devoted to recreation special treats were provided. Madame would bring fine peaches with her, or see that a thimbleful of Spanish wine was offered to each nun. She would sit with her daughters, gathered round the great table in the hall of the community, and turn her spinning-wheel. Madame de Glapion would sing one of the songs of her own province, Madame de Beaurepaire would play the flute; those were happy days! Presently the spinning-wheels were pushed aside and the whole company proceeded to the chapel to offer thanks to God; the young girls sang airs composed by Moreau, their choirmaster; the clear water of pure delights flowed in that valley.

Madame was always grieved to leave it. In her room at Versailles, anonymous letters were awaiting her, full of the wild fury roused in the poor by the libels from Holland; accusing her of buying up all the wheat, bringing the populace to starvation, piling up riches for herself. Then it was that she wrote the words, "My dear daughters accustom me too much to the happiness of living among angels!" And that she might never be entirely parted from Saint-Cyr, she kept with her, in her Versailles apartment, a living emanation from the place, Mademoiselle d'Aumale.

Mademoiselle d'Aumale, her secretary—the successor of several others for whom husbands had been found—was completely devoted to Madame's service. She was full of lively talk; there was a touch of whimsicality about her; she sang well, with a fresh blithe voice; her presence amused the King. In those days Louis XIV did not go very often to Saint-Cyr; the frequency of the royal visits had ended by seeming unsuitable and burdensome. But he still took an interest in the Institute, and knew all the ladies and the pupils by their names. The presence in his private surroundings of this daughter of the valley, who had no dealings with the Court, was very welcome to him. Of an evening, in Madame de Maintenon's room, the King was fond of improvising accompaniments on the lute to the young girl's innocent singing. The Duchesse de Bourgogne brought the merry petulance of her capricious fancies to enliven these family gatherings. The King needed young society. His Spanish blood had given him his gravity, his melancholy, his faith in the value of wearisome display, his august though sterile style of conversation; from his French blood he drew his love of beauty and of harmony, and also his need of gay and witty company, and his extreme sensitiveness to the charm of youth. The faithful Nanon was still there, a saintly lady of the bedchamber. There was Mademoiselle de Pincré, too, a poor child whom Madame de Maintenon had lifted, one day, out of her mother's arms, as she knelt in supplication beside her road. It was a singular family party, an oasis in the populous desert of Versailles that could ill have been spared. Within it the King enjoyed that modest private happiness he had dreamed he might secure by what has been called his "inconceivable marriage"; he sorely needed such a refuge.

Meanwhile, the work of his conversion having been accomplished, the work of his salvation was pursued. Madame de Maintenon had but one political opinion: it consisted in the conviction that the King must ensure the happiness of his realm by the accomplishment of a Christian perfection in his own person. If he really is a Christian, she thought, all will go well; if he neglects this duty, his life will be given up to all the immoderate luxury of the rich, their idleness and hard-heartedness, and on the other hand there will be misery in the poor man's hovel and fury in his heart. The King is the motive power that directs everything. Madame de Maintenon's room is the place where he seeks recreation and repose; it must also be the place where he finds himself once more face to face with the religious views of a woman who never loses sight of her great object. But, we must say it frankly, the austerity of the atmosphere about him sometimes irks him, and heavy silence occasionally descends upon them both. We find traces of these dreary hours in Madame de Maintenon's letters. She had used her influence to secure the appointment of the Cardinal de Noailles to the Archbishopric of Paris; he was almost her kinsman, for Mademoiselle d'Aubigné, the daughter of her brother Charles and "the little Paris gossip," had married the Duc d'Agen. These two had made a sort of plot to carry through the matter of the King's salvation. But Louis XIV would not allow himself to be shepherded along spiritual paths like any nun of the Saint-Cyr community. The business about Quietism may have left him a shade of uncertainty as to the infallibility of the judgment on which he had once pinned his faith. There were days on which his reserve, invariably courteous, was quite impenetrable. Under the cloak of those evangelistic Sunday readings which his companion would have had him share with her, he discerned a most discreet but most unerring criticism. He held his peace; suddenly he would be conscious of a sort of chill when she who was his shadow drew close to him; he escaped her. It was on these occasions that the fount of his conversation would dry up. His partner's confidential letters to the Archbishop reveal her grief, and the anxiety with which the ruinous magnificence of his buildings and his gardens have inspired her. She believes that Providence has placed her near the King to help him in the work of overcoming the fatal temptations that strew an all-powerful monarch's path. She herself, partly out of her love of order, and also, perhaps, as a protest against his displays of useless pomp, still receives her bare four thousand francs a month from the King's purse, supplemented by a New Year's gift of twelve thousand more. The small sums she gives as presents prove the modesty of the income she has deliberately chosen to receive; we hear her mention four hundred francs here, and two hundred there, with the promise of a hundred more " when I can find them," and again, a sack of wheat or rice, " if they send me any." She would fain have taught the King these principles of close economy. Her correspondence with the Archbishop teems with complaints, and occasional symptoms of peevishness.

The King has accepted, for his own life, the discipline of the Christian law, and desires it should rule his kingdom, but he is not filled with the Christian spirit. He never gets beyond a certain point. Once his religious duties have been punctiliously performed, he feels he has done his duty, and returns to the gratification of his love of splendour. A convinced Christian, he submits himself to the moral law of Christianity, but he does not renounce his royal right to create magnificent objects, whose existence and preservation are to constitute his glory. It is true, indeed, that this magnificence is bought with the suffering of the poor, but those who spent their blood in glorious wars have suffered too, and this pre-eminence of France is but another conquest. Thus policy made a doctrine of display, and brought state reasons to support it.

These arguments filled Madame de Maintenon with annoyance. Even in her own room she was confronted with that passion for orderly arrangement thanks to which the cold draughts pouring through noble doors and splendidly proportioned windows caused her such shivering discomfort. " We must perish in symmetry ! " she had once exclaimed. The plash of falling fountains represented nothing, to her, save a laborious effort to interfere with Nature. She failed to comprehend a splendour of which only the weariness and dangers were evident to her. But she did understand that she was fighting, this time, with a principle diametrically opposed to that with which she was herself imbued. This display formed part of a reasoned theory. The King, too, was " perishing in symmetry," that was his system. Disheartened, she wrote, "In my position there is no middle path, one must either delight in it or be worn out by it, you know what that means: I am wearied to death here, because I can neither rest nor be busy, and because backgammon and picquet cannot replace that which I find at Saint-Cyr. If I possessed more virtue, I should not complain so much!" And further on, "I am nothing but an old woman, a trouble to herself and to others!"

Then, quite discouraged, she withdrew into herself, grew more exact than ever in the performance of her religious duties, sent more minute reports of her conduct to the Bishop of Chartres. When she failed to reform matters she endeavoured to repair them, to atone for them, by her prayers, by her own self-denial and the virtuousness of her life. We gain a clear vision, now, of the nature of her whole past existence, and of certain obscure circumstances of her earlier years. To her director she pours out her full confession, and all we have to do is to cast a glance over the great manuscript books into which, after their Mother's death, the ladies of Saint-Cyr copied the private letters their confessor had bequeathed to them. Everything a woman hides from every one but her chosen judge is there. She goes back over her own past, she seeks out its faults, denounces her own failings, begs for help to tread the path of perfection wherein a soul is permitted to atone for its own sins, and the errors of those it loves, and pay the debt they owe to Divine Justice. These confessions of her life, drawn from the inmost depths of her own conscience, provide evidence of Madame de Maintenon's much-contested virtue. A devout woman who has been a libertine's paramour between her twenty-fifth and thirty-fifth year will remember it even at the age of sixty-six, and her confessor will know how to remind her that God will pardon and forget, but that the sinner must never lose the memory of the sin, nor cease to atone for it. It is not at a period when repentance was often so conspicuous in its manifestation that the Bishop of Chartres is likely to have treated a disgraceful past with such indulgence.

This tiresome and long-winded correspondence must be read, and patiently, if any idea of that obscure and occasionally tempted youth is to be reached. When a woman leaves thousands of letters behind her, when she has literally made her confession, in the religious sense, her own testimony, repeated a hundred times over, has more value than all the assertions and judgments penned in secret dens and " shops," and inspired by a passion of annoyance. " I did no harm," wrote Madame de Maintenon, looking back on her young days, " but there was no merit in that, for my character protected me against every passion."

That is the genuine truth; the deserved reproach that Madame de Maintenon brings against herself is concerned with the cold pride that avoided passion as much by temperament as by virtuous feeling. Her inborn puritanism held out with tolerable ease against her youth, her loneliness, her monstrous marriage to Scarron, and, at a later date, against the opportunities of her widowed state. It is worth our while to look at this aged woman, who has tightened the bonds of her friendship with the companions of her youth, unweariedly pursuing, with her confessor's help, her conscientious enquiry into the inadequacy of her own virtue, till the mask her detractors have huddled upon it falls at last. We see her bending over her desk, a noble, unsmiling, emaciated figure, her eyes, still brilliant, half-hidden beneath her spectacles, her long thin hand swiftly tracing the slight characters of her handwriting. This devout old lady is rendering up an account of her conscience, writing her last secrets, as a woman, and an aged woman—some of them delicate, some painful—to the Bishop of Chartres, that most dogmatic of confessors, firm as a rock, and cold—she has said it herself—as ice. We may be sure she tells him no untruths, as she writes those words, traces, so to speak, her same perpetual circle, " I had no passions," " glory was what I sought," confesses that in her heart, purity had been stained with pride.

Towards 1700, in spite of intermittent periods of weariness and coldness, something resembling happiness must have blossomed in the hearts of the King and his wife. Each of them, at any rate, had reached the crowning point of their several undertakings. The Peace of Ryswick had covered the King of France with glory, and the splendour of his buildings and gardens at Versailles had reached its zenith. As to the succession to the throne, no cause for anxiety existed; the Great Dauphin had three sons, and the Duc de Bourgogne had sons of his own. The King's feeling as to the continuity of the work he had begun might well resemble that of a patriarch who has deserved well of his Maker. Madame de Maintenon, on her part, had carried through her first undertaking, the reform of the King's heart, and her second, the creation of Saint-Cyr. She had attained the fulness of her action, half royal, half monastic. The new life at Saint-Cyr had prospered so greatly that swarms had begun to leave the hive. Many young girls who had fallen in love with the ideal set before them desired to carry it into the religious life, and as they could not all obtain entrance to Saint-Cyr, they were going to other convents; some were with the Carmelites, some with the Capuchins. Saint-Cyr was growing into an overcrowded hive, out of which, from time to time, a working-bee would take her flight, and begin the labour to which she owed her own existence in another colony.

It was in this manner that Madame de Maintenon was led to give an Abbess to the convent of Gomerfontaine, an ancient Picard abbey, still a somewhat worldly house, in the old-fashioned style, and filled with rather tepid-minded nuns.

The youthful Abbess—she was only twenty-two—made her appearance at Gomerfontaine just as Angélique Arnauld had made hers at Maubuisson, early in the preceding century. The reception given by the nuns to this newcomer, who owed her appointment to the King, was of the most chilly kind; her coming was a violation of their small autonomy. They listened, with inscrutable faces, to their new Superior's first instructions. A powerful and unseen hand—the hand of Madame de Maintenon—was directing her course. "I made mistakes at Saint-Cyr that I shall not make again," she said. The Abbess, alarmed by the opposition that greeted her, made herself over, with blind confidence, to the counsels of the person who had sent her to perform the work. Constant letters passed between Gomerfontaine, Versailles, and Saint-Cyr. Often Madame de Maintenon, ailing and in her bed, would dictate her letters, Mademoiselle d'Aumale wielding the pen. Gomerfontaine differed from Saint-Cyr, where the atmosphere was of an angelic tenderness, which melted asceticism into a smile. Here there was creative work to be done: this was a matter of correcting faults, tearing out brambles by their stubborn roots. Once more Madame de Maintenon's pen pours out diatribes against the convents. She has "paltry" letters from the Gomerfontaine nuns; she says they have the conventual "style and passion and small-mindedness;" she grows angry; she looks on the "ruin of the majority of the convents as a punishment sent by God." She has a free hand, for the Abbess flings every barrier down before her, and opens every cell. In these last she finds, to her intense disgust, great chairs with high stuffed backs, and wrappers with turned-down collars and no waist belts. In the surgery she discovers sickly young nuns drugged with powders compounded by sly and ignorant quacks. She herself appoints the responsible physician who is to have sole right to prescribe remedies of any kind. "Beyond that," she says, with splendid brevity, "let there be no quacks, and if the hour of your death comes, die in due form!" To die in due form means, in Madame's eyes, to deal straightforwardly with death, and if one must give in, to do it nobly.

The display of paper flowers, blackened with age, and stuck stiffly into the altar vases, is an offence to her. She scolds; she says, "I had a close view, in the outer church, of the artificial bouquets on the altar. Nothing could exceed their dirt. Never dream of having more of them, never make any. When your own garden supplies you with flowers, put them into the vases, simply, without art, and without wasting your time over arranging them. Cleanliness, lights, reverence, silence, fervour, pay far greater honour to God than all those ornaments!" The Protestant spirit in her still protests; old Agrippa's voice still growls from his grandchild's lips.

Concerning abbesses she writes: "I see hardly any other position that brings more scandal on the Church; their haughtiness, their independence, their vanity, their love of the world, of their personal cleanliness, of their own interests, their pursuit of every kind of comfort, their proud treatment of their daughters, all that draws groans from their superiors and from all godly people." There is no doubt that things had gone very far wrong at Gomerfontaine. Madame's letters recall the tone of a careful physician, filled with anxiety after the performance of an operation, ready to return to his patient's bedside on the smallest alarm, but withdrawing his presence the moment he sees him on the highroad to recovery.

She will write four letters in one day, if that is necessary, and will not make a sign for a whole month afterwards, if all goes well and there is nothing to be done save to "convey useless praises." "I have lived too long," she writes one day, "not to know what is meant by an abuse of superintendence, very seldom is it sincere and upright!" Sometimes she would send Mademoiselle d'Aumale, her second self, to Gomerfontaine. The young girl would bring the very voice of Saint-Cyr with her, she would repeat the teachings learnt in the course of those intimate daily talks. Madame's praises were sung, her letters read and re-read and discussed. Some good recruits were coming to the Abbey. Should the Abbess reveal symptoms of a closer understanding with one or other of her daughters to her friend at Versailles, the response came swiftly back, "Has any Superioress a party of her own? Are you not the Mother of them all?" "Do not expect," she says again, "to be able to rule without being blamed." Madame de Gomerfontaine had too tender a heart, no doubt. When Mademoiselle d'Aumale came, the young Abbess would not allow her to return; it became necessary to send for the young messenger, who would then take her way back to Versailles, leaving Madame de Gomerfontaine, a trifle homesick, in the midst of her nuns, who were divided amongst themselves.

The Abbess had a difficult task to perform; it was beyond the strength of her timid nature. She had her own weaknesses and temptations too. The example of certain fair and generous penitents inspired her, one day, with the idea of opening the doors of her convent to Mademoiselle de Séry, the Duc d'Orléans' mistress, who had just received her dismissal, and desired to spend the period of her bitter sorrow in the shelter of some cloister. But Madame dealt with the matter severely, and promptly. "Although it is my intention," she wrote, "to criticize every line of your letter, my dear Abbess" (the letter, then, had pleaded the sinner's cause), "I will begin by telling you that the candour and simplicity with which you speak have charmed me. I never for a moment doubted that you would be distressed when I took Mademoiselle de Séry from you. A little longing for her conversion and a hope of great future benefits furnish you with many excuses in God's sight. You reason on false grounds when you say she had freed herself by her own will. It was Monsieur le Duc d'Orléans who dismissed her, and on the first occasion the poor girl would not accept it. Thus she would have entered your house filled with passion and despair, painted, magnificent to look upon, and, in a word, thoroughly worldly, and even thoroughly criminal. I confess that such a sight appeared to me dangerous for an Abbess just thirty years of age!" Beside this picture, touched with the brilliant colour of that period, of the proud mistress who weeps her fall, but not her fault, we will place a precept we discover in another letter: "Let us not allow ourselves to be swept away by the torrent of custom, which will provide no excuse for any of us, in God's sight!"

What a moralist! The Protestant spirit that saturates her being may not indulge in free examination of the Scriptures, but it never wearies of the free examination of persons, happenings, customs. Her Calvinistic tendency to condemn Nature finds its corrective in her faith in the efficacy of effort, backed by prayer.

It was a pure doctrine, yet something is lacking to it. The reformer's work did not endure, she had lived too far away from it. Her daughters fancied they might capture her spirit in the letters they copied with such pious care, and keep it safely. She gave wise counsels, but she did not give herself. If we compare her with Angélique Arnauld, we see the two female reformers both inspired by the same moral ideal: the perpetual atonement for the original stain. But how different is their mode of action! The work of one is an external work, performed with all her infallible and somewhat cold clear-sightedness. The other's labour is of the internal kind, served by the burning energy of her own example, of a life and penitence shared with her daughters. The first is a light that illuminates, the second is a consuming fire. Immediately after Madame de Maintenon had written those counsels instinct with the highest moral teaching to the Abbess, the same delicate hand penned the following lines to Madame de Caylus: "I beg you, my dear niece, to choose me, quite at your leisure, a gown and a white and gold petticoat, and let there be six breadths; I should wish the gown to be black and gold; the linings to be of *gros de Tours*, for the summer, and not of a rich material. If you cannot find anything black and gold, take violet and gold, or very dark blue . . . the personage must be dressed up, though the person has no longing for anything but a tomb!"

She stands midway between two worlds. "The person" lives with her heart at Saint-Cyr or Gomerfontaine, and longs for one thing only, a tomb; "the personage," attired in violet and gold twilled silk, who watches the duchesses squabble, of an evening, over the honour of handing her glass of water, dwells at Versailles. Neither the "person" nor the "personage" enjoyed perfect freedom. The limit of her liberty was marked by her grandeur, by what was known as her good fortune, by her royal servitude. There was no great scope for liberty in the case of a "person" who could not be entirely dissociated from the "personage."

She was well aware of it, and though she strove to inspire her daughters with that joyful serenity reserved for the children of God, she never enjoyed it in her own person. She wrote to Madame de Glapion, one day, "Since you have renounced the pleasures of this world, why do you take all its sorrows on your shoulders?" She herself, who had not been able to renounce the pleasures of this world, bore the burden of its sorrows too. It was all very well for her to say of her disciples " my daughters." But her daughters were not children trained up by their Mother in an existence that she shared with them, and while she strove to set these daughters' feet on the road to happiness, she herself was chained to the world and to its miseries.

At all events she did her best to relieve the misery of which she was a perpetual witness. This was in the year 1709; after a prolonged struggle, the French armies had suffered defeat in Spain; the country was famished, the cold was bitter. The King declared he could not lay heavier taxes on some, so as to give bread to others. He handed over his own gold and silver plate, and by this example incited his courtiers to do likewise; everything was sent to the mint. Madame de Maintenon's mind turned to her daughters. There was suffering at Saint-Cyr, there was suffering at Gomerfontaine, and the Mother could do but very little for her children. " It is true," she wrote, " that the King is sending for wheat from foreign countries, but it will not be at my disposal. You will get the benefit of it by seeing the market prices go down." She sent recipes for making war-bread out of wheatflour mixed with barley-meal or rice. " This time," she said, " the nuns really are poor ! " and in her anxiety she writes, a few days later, " I am afraid of your not making the barley bread properly; nobody can relish it in soup. I have eaten some mixed with wheatflour which was very good. Monsieur Fagon vows it is not unwholesome. Eat rice, porridge, peas, beans, artichokes, pumpkins, none of those are unwholesome. Nuns always fancy they are weak; one can live on very little food."

She was sixty-two. The cycle she had accomplished was drawing to its close. She was coming back, with her daughters, to the starting-point, and she exhorted them to follow the level path of a life spent in modest poverty.

One last precaution she must take, in the case of the Ladies of Saint-Cyr, at any rate, against possible temptation in the future. Madame de Maintenon spent much of her time in a sort of meditation on things beyond the grave. In obedience to the King's desire, the Ladies of Saint-Cyr had retained their secular habiliments after they had pronounced their final vows. Madame de Maintenon, who realized the perfection and also the precarious quality of her work, was resolved, before she died, to break the slender link that still connected the Institute with the outer world. At Saint-Cyr she had no difficulty about obtaining the acceptance of this final reform. Her one embarrassment was connected with the King. He still nursed his old prejudice against the dreary trappings of the conventual life, and his preference for an Institute in which the recluses retained the appearance and dress of perfect gentlewomen. We will allow Madame de Maintenon to tell us the story of the manner in which she set about obtaining the King's consent to the crowning change in her own words.

" We desired this habit," says one of the ladies, naïvely, " because we were accustomed to desire everything that Madame wished; before she spoke to the King on the subject, she had a doll dressed as we are now, and showed it to him, and this is how she told us the thing had happened. ' The King,' she said, ' having desired, in spite of our remonstrances, that you should keep your secular dress when you took your solemn vows, and the Pope having granted his consent, I had quite ceased to think of speaking to him about it, for I did not wish to cause him vexation about a matter that is not essential. But when, in the course of this last Lent, I said to him that your establishment was growing more settled every day, and that the only thing to be desired, now, to make it perfect, was to see you wearing the religious habit, he said to me, sharply, " Are you still thinking of that? " " They will have to do it some day," I replied. " Why should they be an exception in the Church? They are looking forward to it so much that they have asked me to make them a pattern habit, which they are keeping by them." " Then they mean to take it after my death," said the King. " That idea pains me; I do not like them to be tempted to wish for that, and I would rather they took it at once, if it must be done." I replied that however much you might long to have the habit, that would not prevent you from praying to God to spare him, and that most urgently, and that I even believed he could not doubt the love that was borne him at Saint-Cyr. "What kind of habit would you give them?" said the King. I replied, "I would not give them the habit worn by any other order. We have invented one with which they seem very much pleased." He said to me with a pitiful look, "Would you take away their great cloaks and their gold crosses and their gloves?" "No," said I, "many nuns wear them." "I should like to see the model habit you have had made." I promised to show it to him. Some weeks passed by, in the course of which he said to me, now and then, "Madame, do show me your model habit!" But I did not hurry myself, for I wanted to pique his curiosity. At last I had the habit, fitted on to a doll, brought in a box to Marly. When the King was alone in my room, he said to me, "When are you going to show me the habit you mean for the Ladies of Saint-Cyr?" I answered carelessly, "The doll I have had dressed in it is on my table, if you care to look at it." He took it out of the box himself, looked at it attentively, and was very well pleased with it. At first he did not like the scapular, but when I told him I was giving it to you because your gowns opened in front, and to hide the opening, he approved of that as well as of the rest of the dress. There were no gloves on the doll, and the King desired you should have them, bronze-black, as before.' This consent having been given, Madame de Maintenon brought the doll here to show it to us more thoroughly than when we had first seen it, and told us she intended us to take the habit with as little delay as possible."

With full ceremony, kissing each item as they put it on, the Ladies of Saint-Cyr took their new habit. They were going back into the common path; the reform had reached perfection, for every trace of reform had disappeared. All innovations had been put away. The greatest innovation did not lie in alteration, but in perpetual renovation according to the ancient principle, drawn from the purest source. The rule of the Augustine order reigned intact. The ghost of Saint Augustus, if it had found its way into that valley, would have smiled upon his dutiful daughters. To protect themselves from future peril, the Ladies were piling up traditions and memories. The earliest guardians had already passed out of sight, some swept away by tempest, some by death. Even before Madame de Maintenon's soul had left her body, it had been enshrined in the bulky volumes of manuscript ranged among the convent archives. In 1709, Godet-des-Marais breathed his last; his heart, enclosed in a silver urn, was deposited in the Chapel of Saint-Cyr.

CHAPTER XI

THE CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE PRINCESSE DES URSINS—PUBLIC MISFORTUNES

Correspondence with the Princesse des Ursins at Madrid—Public misfortunes—Steadfastness of the King—Madame de Maintenon at Fontainebleau—Deaths of the Princes and Princesses—Madame de Maintenon surrounded by catastrophe: she shares the King's sorrows.

At this moment, when Saint-Cyr was ensuring the survival of the forceful spirit of an aged and fragile woman, the actual close of her life was really far distant. That poor health to which she so frequently refers had driven her to exclaim, "I am a shadow, dragged from bed to bed, from one alcove to another!" But the real truth was that the chilly invalid was thus enabled to escape crowds and noise, the "regrettable odours" of a bevy of courtiers and lackeys, and the perfumes of the fine ladies, "those powders that make my head split." In the retirement of her own rooms, even in her bed, she could say her prayers and dictate her letters, and spin; listening to the automatic revolutions of her spinning-wheel, her thoughts likewise would spin, whirling around her plans and undertakings.

Let us look at her, for instance, in 1706, when she is keeping up that strange and intimate correspondence with the Princesse des Ursins. Thus we may gauge what may be called, in a certain sense, her action on politics. This intercourse with the "camerera mayor" whom the King had placed about the first of the Spanish Bourbons is yet another mission, to be performed by her for a period of eight years, and the programme of which she thus defines: "Nothing is more settled, Madame, than that I am to have the honour of writing to you every week."

At Madrid, for six years past, the King's grandson, Philippe V., had carried on his rule, and felt the Spanish throne, his right to which the Austrian Archduke disputed, tremble beneath him. He had appealed to his grandfather, whose object in accepting the Spanish crown for his descendant had been to extend the power of the French dynasty in Europe, and render it supreme. The King was very young; he had received the haphazard education then generally bestowed on junior princes—one which made his brother the Duc de Berry choke with regret. It was a complicated business: officially, the King of France was bound to respect his grandson's independent sovereignty; but he was also bound to multiply, in all the young King's surroundings, the invisible threads that were to bind him to the strong French stock from which he sprang, and so defend him against intrigue, and revolt, and his own weakness.

It had all been carefully thought out. After his accession, in 1701, Philippe had been married to the younger sister of the Duchesse de Bourgogne, a little thirteen-year-old Queen, accustomed from her earliest childhood to believe her elder sister's position as future Dauphine of France the very apogee of human glory. She, too, was a child of malleable character, easily led by all the delicate arguments that touch a sensitive heart. In the person of Madame de Maintenon the Duchesse de Bourgogne had found an incomparable instructress at the Court of France; about the little sister in Spain another guardian was placed—the Princesse des Ursins.

It was a happy choice. The Princesse des Ursins, first married to the Comte de Chalais, had also lost her second husband, Bracciano, an Italian. She had kept open house at Rome, she had been made a grandee of Spain, she would be accepted by the Spanish nobles as one of themselves, she spoke their language, had long been acquainted with their customs. Her proud and noble demeanour was admired. The French King's ambassador would discuss all political affairs, and send his official despatches to Versailles; within the walls of his palace, at the Spanish King's elbow, there would be a Frenchwoman, whose mind would be perpetually fixed on fostering the union of the two courts—a union cemented in the closest fashion by the family bond.

The first sojourn of the Princesse des Ursins at the Court of Madrid covered a period of four years. Then there was a hitch; the French Ambassador took offence at the presence of an unofficial envoy, whose deft hands held threads he could not touch; he made a complaint about her secret and vexatious doings. The Princess was recalled, kept in disgrace, ordered to live in the country. But little by little, in short stages, the wily diplomatist made her way back to Versailles, and there appeared one day, with head held high and a smile in her clear eyes, praying for leave to plead her cause in person. After two hours spent in close conversation with this most eloquent and witty of culprits, the monarch yielded; he pitied and admired her. That very evening, at the select gathering at Marly, she was seen seated, more at her ease than ever, between the King, who leaned constantly towards her, and Madame de Maintenon. She was going back to Spain; the young sovereigns delighted in her presence, they were beseeching the King to allow her to return, as a kindness, a gift, on his part. This time, at all events, she would leave an ally behind her at the Court; that shadow carried from one bed to another, against whom not all the intriguers of Versailles were able to prevail.

The Princess and the Marquise were much of an age. We have noted the intimacy between them in their youthful days, in the d'Albret household. They were servants of the same cause; they understood each other. Through their correspondence the two monarchs, grandfather and grandson, would understand each other likewise. There is not a symptom of personal affection, nor effusion of any sort, between the two ladies. Each was to undertake the part played nowadays by "family ambassadors," to tighten the bonds between their respective courts, and gain a hearing for a kinsman's voice. The agreement was faithfully kept. The Princess perceived the opportunity it gave her for keeping the King of France informed of matters she desired him to know, and which his ambassador's despatches would never mention.

What a correspondence! Madame de Maintenon grew fond of her epistolary mission. It is a new, a serious work, added to all the rest; she serves the King (at his request, no doubt) by maintaining his personal contact with a young court whose independence of France, and complete separation from that country, must be publicly proclaimed to a suspicious continent.

The secret duties of a Minister in private life suit her perfectly. She can perform them without a word to the King's ministers, and see little or nothing of Versailles beyond the confines of her own apartment. The position she has taken up is very simple; she has no knowledge of business. Many things are mentioned in her presence, many more are hidden from her, and she prefers to restrict herself to matters touching domestic life. But domestic life includes the matters that concern the heart, and here is the delicate point. There is a question of self-respect about it: the Princess is not to have any personal policy—that is her promise, at least—but she knows right well that Madame de Maintenon reads her letters to the King; when she receives those the "shadow" writes to her, and notes the praises they contain, she perceives a royal flavour in that ambrosia. Above all things, the fraternal bond between the Duchesse de Bourgogne and the Queen of Spain is fed with constant care; for this constitutes the real link that binds the two crowns. The two young Princesses have hardly any recollection of each other. Their father, the Duc de Savoie, has joined the enemies of France. The tie of blood must be warmed back into life. For these two, as for the women who are their guides, the Pyrenees do not exist.

Before the Princesse des Ursins' first return from Madrid, the Spanish Ambassador had never seen Madame de Maintenon's face. The two ladies had agreed they would only use the secret machinery of life. The infinitesimal yet all-powerful weight of the two monarchs' personal feelings was to be taken into due account, in their diplomacy. To this fact we owe many sketches of domestic existence which would never have found a place in memorandums written by a subject whose view is limited to the splendour of the sovereign's public doings. Here politics seem to hold their peace; the rulers of the world speak now, and from their hearts. Some piece of good news, such as the announcement of a victory, reaches Versailles; at once the King hurries across the ante-chambers to tell Madame de Maintenon; she is at supper in her cabinet, with the ladies of the Palace; she throws down her table-napkin and runs to meet the King. The Duchesse de Bourgogne sheds joyful tears, and flies to her writing-desk to write her sister "the most amiable letter in the world." The message travels, light and gladsome, like Victory herself. At Madrid, it renews the bliss born of success, stimulates the young King's affection and pride. We hear of hopes of motherhood, too, the births of baby princes; then indeed the letters are stuffed with news, and more stress yet is laid on kinship and its affections. The garments of the expected Infant of Spain are chosen in Paris, and Clément, the Duchesse de Bourgogne's own accoucheur, crosses the terrible mountains to attend the little Queen of Spain. In fraternal agreement, the two princesses bestow princes on their peoples; a Louis at Versailles, a Luisillo at Madrid. The Princesse des Ursins seeks out four handsome nurses, sits in their midst, listening to their ringing voices and their pious ejaculations; the little Queen appears, a youthful creature, heavy with child—a madonna whose mantle they cover with their kisses. Madame de Maintenon, on her side, enlarges on the love the populace bears the newborn heir to the throne of France. These two old fairies, two aged godmothers, hang over the royal cradles, laying the foundations, long beforehand, of an enduring and indissoluble alliance destined to unite two future Kings.

In times of trouble, the same secret spring is touched; the Princesse des Ursins sends her ally the story, couched in noble and glowing language, of her Queen's flight before the Imperial troops, the dreary nights at Pampeluna, her wretched bed, the unpainted wooden table that carries, turn and turn about, her golden toilet service and her writing-desk. It is well to claim compassion, but confidence, too, must be inspired. Madame des Ursins knows her correspondent's nature, and that Madame de Maintenon is only too prone to look on the dark side of things. In her own case, misfortune is invariably confronted with a face of smiling scorn; the jealous chops and changes of war just serve to keep the balance fair between the good days and the bad. Madame de Maintenon is not wholly of this world; there lie at once her virtue and her failing. Withdrawn into what Madame des Ursins denominates " your impenetrable refuge," the recluse pursues her dream of peace and moral reform, whereas the energetic and indomitable Princess will not hear of anything but the most obstinate prosecution of the war, and gives a most unfriendly reception to her friend's suggestion that she should beg the nuns of the Incarnation for their prayers: " I believe all nuns in general to be good creatures; I am not acquainted with one who is particularly saintly; for this reason, instead of making any special appeal to them, we appeal to excellent troops (those of the King of France), who give no quarter to anybody, and cut off the heads, legs, and arms of everyone they are not able to make prisoner." As to this matter they are at variance, thoroughly and fundamentally, and they are both of them aware of it. In one case the reverses of the French arms aggravate a passion of warlike feeling, and in the other an equally passionate desire for peace. Politeness scarcely masks their mutual annoyance. We can sometimes almost hear the Princess laugh with sarcastic scorn as she jeers at the friend who mourns over the calamities of war, and writes to her, " The King and Queen of Spain have good reason to love you as they do: your devotion to them has led you to cease being a Frenchwoman; we must forgive you, and pray God to change your state!"

A storm is brewing! " I only ventured to write my letter," the Princess replies, " so as to convince you that I am a better Frenchwoman, possibly, than anybody else." And again, " If so numerous an army as the King's is never to act with anything but weakness, and always at the wrong time, you have only too much reason to dread the worst; but allow me to tell you that you ought not to have so poor an opinion of the troops, and the generals who may command them, as to believe they will not be able to set everything right. To fall into despair and think oneself bound to give up everything proves a lack of courage. I hope history may never record such an event, and that the series of splendid actions the King has performed may never be tarnished by a shameful peace. It even seems, Madame, that nobody ought to listen with anything but indignation to those who counsel it at such a price!"

What does the King think when he reads these letters? What does Madame de Maintenon say to him about them? Does she make any attempt to use her influence to hasten the peace she so earnestly desires? We can perceive, at all events, how slight her influence on politics really is, for deeply as she longs for a cessation of hostilities which would end the bitter suffering of the people of France, she sees the war drag on. She takes refuge, then, in mystic arguments; the issue of the struggle is in God's hands, and the reverses He inflicts upon us are a manifestation of His will. "How can you say, Madame," she writes, "that God has not declared Himself against us, when He sends us" (this is in 1709) "a winter such as has not been known for a hundred and five or a hundred and six years, which freezes all the corn and all the vines, and not only leaves us without any fruit for the present, but kills all the trees as well? The olive trees in Provence and Languedoc, the chestnuts in the Limousin, the walnut trees all over France, are ruined for years to come. We see the poor dying of hunger, and can do nothing to help them, because our own lands have ceased to yield any produce!"

Feeble arguments! "All these sorrows will soon fade away, Madame," the Princess replies, "if everything possible is done this winter, as you have given us reason to hope, to establish the troops thoroughly in their positions, and put a new face on matters. Our enemies have enjoyed an excessive good fortune for so long a time that our turn to be fortunate too must surely come."

The Princess felt no inclination to submit. She had a personal interest in the great game; her heart was set on winning it and gaining something by it, on finding herself, when all was done, established as the ruler of a little state to be carved for her out of Dutch territory. She was too politic not to appear devout among the Spaniards; she would take her little Queen from one sanctuary to another, to kiss Madonnas' robes and pin jewels on their mantles; but she loathed the party of the bigots, and the encroaching monks who, from the safety of their monastic fortresses, sought to steal the thunderbolts of heaven and launch them at the head of France. "This riff-raff has no love for us!" she would say, and was convinced the best service she could do her country was to fight on obstinately. The people of the two nations might suffer hunger and cold, but their complaint was but the feeble chirping of grasshoppers under the rays that were to shed the light of victory. The will of Heaven, the olive trees of Provence, were no augury of that! It hung on human will and human skill, and above all, on luck!

The Versailles friend was a faint-hearted being; her ally at Madrid would laugh at her, a little indignantly, at times, and then again indulgently, but never could she succeed in stirring her to any belligerent feeling, nor lessen her pity for the populace, nor inspire her with any faith in luck.

At Versailles the grief caused by the disasters was intense, and poisoned, as it were, by the recognition of the "chances" that had been missed, the mistakes committed, the bitter recriminations between generals and princes. Louis XIV's majestic fortitude never failed him. He opened his arms, with deep emotion, to the grandson who had been unfortunate in war. He cheered the hearts of his beaten marshals with considerate words. He stood firm like a great oak that feels, even in the midst of tempest, the strength of the roots it has been sending forth for centuries past. But what a sea of moral distress surged round him in that magnificent Versailles, his own deliberate creation, which he alone could savour and comprehend! He must have looked, in his impassiveness, like some ancient god who, knowing all things, yet holds his peace, because the function of his divine essence is to hover above the turmoil of those fields whereon fortune casts her dice. Everything was failing him, even to his sole joy, the merry confident smile of the Duchesse de Bourgogne; the young creature, who had so delighted, once, in balls and festivities and plays, and had been something of a coquette too, drew herself up proudly to meet the blow, and was absorbed, now, in the thought of her husband's reputation; for Vendôme, the cynic and intriguer, had left him a mere shadow of command, so that he might be able to impute all failures to him. The Duchesse de Bourgogne, all submission, now, to Madame de Maintenon's influence, fasted and mortified herself, in her aunt's company, and spent nights with her in prayer and weeping, supplicating Heaven to grant success to the King's arms, and put an end to all cabals. The King himself realized that suffering was wearing out the love and the religious feeling he had been able to teach his people. But he also felt, thanks to the royal instinct that was his gift, that his own strength lay in his majesty, and his majesty in his calm. Nowhere, save in Madame de Maintenon's room, that refuge of his human feelings, did he betray his private sorrow. There his tears did flow. There he was in the company of Christian people who humbled themselves before their God, and strove to recognize the faults which had brought these calamities upon them. And there, too, but without success, Madame de Maintenon tried to impress her pacific views on the King's mind.

Intercourse with her correspondent beyond the mountains had grown languid. The velvet masks had dropped; quite withdrawn into her inner life, the aged servant of the Church viewed this contemporary of her own (who still bubbled over with human ambitions and political projects, and was superbly indifferent to scourges that were driving the French populace to raise the cry of famine) with a sort of terror. Beneath her crimson curtains she read and re-read her letters from the Bishop of Chartres, and found in them the indications of her line of conduct. "God," her director taught her, "had placed her where she was to devote her life to the King, the Royal Family, and Saint-Cyr." She was content with that; her imagination never flew away with her when she looked at the maps that showed how far the genius of the French had made its way. She herself had never been out of France. She had followed the King occasionally when he joined his armies, but she had done it in obedience to his wish, shut up in her coach, and never looking upon war and conquest save through the fog-dimmed window-glasses which she let down a bare three fingers' width when the King himself came, bareheaded and leaning on his cane, to inquire how she did. A conquered kingdom was no great thing in her eyes, but a reform that healed the misery of a whole province seemed to her a victory worth a mighty effort. In the long run, her Spanish correspondent tired her out with her passionate and belligerent views, and she sent cold and purely formal answers.

In the Forest of Fontainebleau she had organized a little sphere of employment, charitable and religious, for herself. During the long autumn days of sport, not being, as she said, inclined to "hunt the stag," she would betake herself, with Mademoiselle d'Aumale, to the little village of Avon. Descending from her coach, she would enter the place on foot, leaning on her young companion's arm. She would go into the church (which is still to be seen, a somewhat crooked little building), and find the village children waiting for her. Sitting down in their midst, she taught them "why they were in the world." Then her smile returned, and her eyes began to shine once more. A flash of merriment crossed her face, when a little boy to whom she had put one of those formidable questions in the catechism, "What is God?" looked at her out of his innocent eyes and answered, trembling with the sense of his own ignorance, "Yes!" If she could have had her will, the King, instead of "hunting the stag" while the country was at war, would have seated himself, like Saint Louis, at the foot of some great oak, to hear his subjects' complaints, and dispense his own justice to them. Coming back from these expeditions, Mademoiselle d'Aumale tells us, Madame's eyes would sparkle with joy. "You would have thought she was in Paradise!" This was her true nature; bold and courageous in all matters of moral reform, timid in the face of the vast and cruel designs of statecraft.

She went to Moret, too, on the edge of the Forest, to see the Benedictines who lived there. The Loing flows lazily along, its bosom studded with waterlilies; it is a sheltered familiar landscape, such as her eyes craved to look upon. Saint-Simon slanders her when he describes this haunting and yet invisible recluse as an unworthy and clandestine spouse; but he tells the truth when he asserts that she only saw the world through "the neck of a bottle." All she could perceive through this bottle-neck of a world in arms, was the tears that were shed, the evil tidings. In conversation with Madame de Glapion—here we should always look for her, see her, hear her—she said, one day, in that weak, rather broken voice of hers, "My mind is always full of Spain, on the brink of ruin, with peace further off every day, and the miseries of which I hear on every side; such thousands of people in suffering under my very eyes, and I powerless to help, and then, in religious matters, all the abuses that exist at the present time! I am conscious," she added, "of the sorrows of the King, the Princes, and the State, to a degree that is known to God alone." "In that, Madame," said Madame de Glapion, "you are more to be pitied than they, for princes, generally speaking, are not extremely sensitive." She replied, "It is because I am not great, I have only been raised up!"

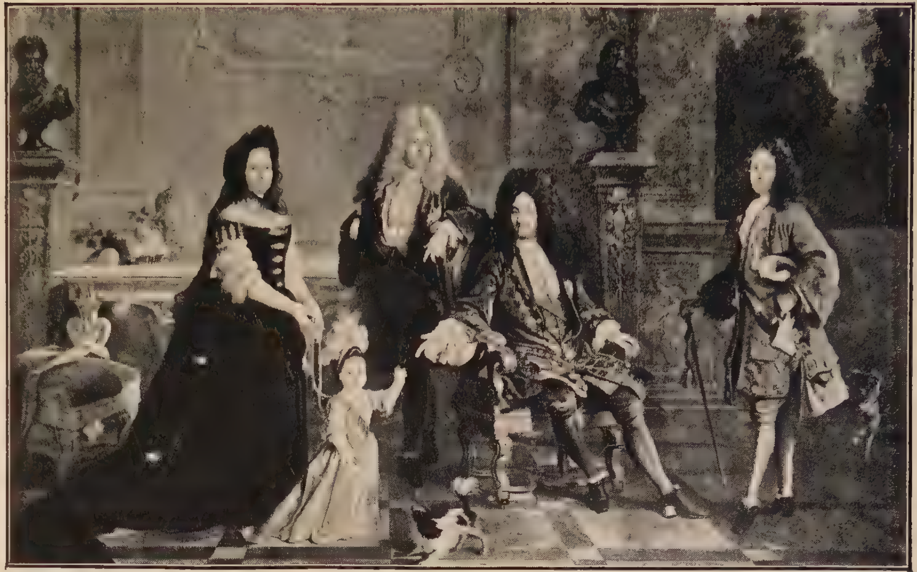
That condition of being "only raised up" meant that she had to endure the infinite sorrows of the great without possessing that callousness which some describe as dignity and some as selfishness, and which Louis XIV, the most magnificent specimen of what a royal individual may be, possessed in the superlative degree. It meant, further, her right to judge the great with all the unreasonableness and severity of their inferiors. The faults of the great were an abomination to her.

Wherefore, in the midst of all these portents of evil, and the perturbation a series of reverses had brought into the life of a woman now seventy-five years of age, Madame began to fail. "I am too old," she said, "to endure the sight of the revolutions our princes will behold." More and more she shut herself up, and hid her tears; wherever she followed the Court she must have an ultimate retreat that she could render inaccessible. For the sojourns at Versailles and Marly, she had her refuge at Saint-Cyr; at Fontainebleau she had a house in the town, where she was able to shut herself up in utter privacy. Her lucid mind still worked on, dreading the uncertainties of the future, but taking fresh hope when her silent terrors, and the King's, were calmed by the sight of that much-loved couple, the Duc and Duchesse de Bourgogne.

"On April 8, 1711, Monseigneur, who had just quitted the Château of Meudon on his way to hunt the stag, saw a priest go by carrying the Communion to a sick man. He dismounted with Madame la Duchesse de Bourgogne, to worship our Lord upon his knees. He asked to what sick person the sacrament was being brought; he learnt the sick man had the smallpox. This struck him; and he said he should not be surprised if he had it himself."

Thus does Saint-Simon give us the first inkling of the chill that strikes us when the prelude of the funeral symphony destined to drown the music of the King's proud trumpets falls upon our ears.

The next day, Monseigneur rose as usual, intending to go wolf-hunting, but turned faint while he was dressing, and was put to bed. The King was notified, and arrived from Versailles with Madame de Maintenon. A little pavilion at Chaville, in the Meudon woods, "the sanctuary," was hastily furnished. Here Madame de Maintenon, with two or three of her closest female friends, was to spend the period of the Dauphin's illness. The complaint was declared to be smallpox; the livid spots had shown themselves on Monseigneur's face. Fagon promised a cure; the King kept an impassive silence, held his councils, financial and others, read his



Wallace Collection.] [*Photo: W. E. Gray.*

Louis XIV surrounded by the Great Dauphin, the Duc de Bourgogne, and the Duc d'Anjou, led by Duchesse de Ventadour

dispatches, spent his leisure hours with Madame de Maintenon, in the little pavilion in the Chaville woods. The illness ran a course of forty days, during which the King was constantly with his son.

On the evening of May 15th the courtiers assembled at Versailles, stifling their individual hopes or fears, waited for news. The Duc de Berry was at table with his consort and their guests. A courier appeared upon the scene, said something to the Prince in an undertone. The Prince sprang suddenly to his feet, and all his company with him; Monseigneur lay dying, at Meudon. The room rang with the outcry. The King was leaving the dying man—this was the established rule, for the King could be face to face with death once only, on the day when he, too, must bow his head before the messenger. He entered his coach to go to Marly with Madame de Maintenon. He sent to beg his granddaughter, the Duchesse de Bourgogne, to meet them as they passed, a few minutes later, through Versailles. The only face he longed to see, of all his kindred's, was that young and tender countenance, bathed in tears. When the Princess saw the King, she would have kissed him, but Madame de Maintenon, from the back of the coach, begged her to refrain, and said, " We are plague-stricken ! " The coach rolled on, the darkness hid its lantern lights.

At Meudon the King had astounded his startled courtiers by appointing, in his level voice, the hour for the next day's council. But none the less we may be sure that in the solitude of that first night at Marly, behind those closed doors the threshold of which no memoir writer crossed, the majestic mask the King of France had worn was cast aside in the presence of the woman who had so often read his heart—a heart still full, like other men's, of weakness and emotion. We may be certain, too, that Madame de Maintenon did her utmost to turn the King's thoughts from those last dying hours, and drive away the deadly miasma that clung about them both, even to their sense of smell. We know her well enough for that. We fancy we see her sitting in her alcove, stooping to open the prayer-books she keeps there always, ready for the King, softening, by her Christian outlook upon death, the bitterness of the tears a father, even when he is vowed to majesty, cannot deny to his own human sorrow.

The time for weeping and lamenting was short; it was but an element of the pomp connected with a royal death, the gloomy music that attended the mourning train. The day after the Dauphin's death, the King received his two grandsons in Madame de Maintenon's room at Marly. This was the final outpouring of their private woe. There was no noisy grief. The Princes mourned a father; the King forced himself to be calm. He wore the clothes he had worn at Meudon, he kissed the Duchesse de Bourgogne. It was observed, with admiration, that she was courageous, and betrayed no dread of contagion. The evening was spent after this fashion, in Madame de Maintenon's room. On the following morning the courtiers crowded into the narrow rooms of Marly to present their mourning compliments to the King; the men in great cloaks, the ladies in long mantles. So great was the contrast between this funereal apparel and the careless hearts that beat beneath it, that the solemn expression of the courtiers' faces was seen to relax; a lady from the provinces, muffled in the most portentous weepers, stumbled and fell while she was executing her curtsey; the spirit of mourning took to flight; a burst of laughter broke the silence.

Monseigneur was not deeply mourned. His corpse was conveyed secretly to Saint-Denis, in a coach the window-glasses of which had been smashed to let the coffin through. The sudden nature of his illness, its virulence, the pestilential odour from the corpse, caused general alarm. The peasants living on the road along which the coach travelled retired into their houses, and shut their doors, as it rolled by.

In reality Monseigneur's death was a relief. By passing out of life he realized hopes that had been set on him against all hope. The discreet disappearance of a prince who was quite unfit to reign earned him a general indulgence. People recalled his modesty, his kindly treatment of his valets.

The Duc de Bourgogne paid pious honour to his father's memory, and then, as Dauphin, entered, with his young wife, into his place at the King's side, far above all cabals. The King had felt a certain impatience, now and then, when he noted his grandson's strict piety, his plans for reforms that always favoured the suffering populace; he fancied he detected, in Fénelon's pupil, a respectful opposition to his own policy of war and splendour. But the reverses, the heavy years now leading him on to the close of his long reign, had softened the King's heart; he began to look with an indulgent eye upon his heir, this serious young man, burning with zeal, in love with the kingdom and its inhabitants; for all too short a time, the aged King and the King who was to come after him understood each other, had but one heart and one soul—the soul of a monarch and a Frenchman.

There was a close understanding, too, between Madame de Maintenon and the new Dauphine. If the "aunt" had ever loved any one at Court, it had probably been the Duc du Maine, that "weakness of her heart," but the strength of her heart was the charming Princess on whose mind—in the long run, and in spite of youthful caprices—she had left the impress of her own teachings. Then Louis XIV and Madame de Maintenon, that aged couple, smiled on the future, nay, even on Death, who was drawing so near to them both. The King was entering into the hope that filled his faithful subjects. Addressing a deputation from the Clergy, he alluded, in his clear voice, to his own great age and his approaching death. Pointing to the heir to the throne, who stood beside him, he added, "Here is the Prince whose virtue and piety will bring yet more prosperity to the Church, and greater happiness to the Kingdom." Calmly he faced his own departure, with his eyes on the modest and earnest young man who was to carry on his reign. "He will do everything better than I!" he would say magnanimously. He requested his Ministers to work in private with the Duc de Bourgogne, reply to all his questions, and inform him as to the smallest details of any business, whenever he requested them to do so.

This splendid, this wellnigh Messianic hope lasted one year!

On the evening of Friday, February 5, 1712, the Dauphine, then at Versailles, felt a touch of fever, and took to her bed. With a shade of anxiety she remarked on the disappearance of a box of Spanish snuff, some of which she had taken that morning. She had a sharp pain in her temples; an attempt was made to dull the suffering with tobacco, smoked and chewed, and a quantity of opium, and by bleeding her arm, twice over. Some spots appeared on the skin, and those about the patient hoped they betokened measles. Madame de Maintenon seated herself beside the Dauphine's bed, watched over her, never left her save when she went to her own room because the King desired her presence there. The Dauphin, quivering with alarm, never quitted the bedside; the King came over and over again, each day. On the tenth day of the illness, the Père Delarue, official confessor to the Dauphine, without any intention of alarming her, begged her to be so good as to make her confession. The Princess gave the Jesuit no reply. The Père Delarue grasped the situation, and, bending over her, reassured her as to any desire she might have to confess to some other priest, and besought her to whisper the name to him. The sick woman mentioned the Père Bailly. The Père Bailly was not to be found. Then the Dauphine mentioned a Recollet monk, the Père Noël. Without betraying any astonishment at a request that scandalized many persons, Madame de Maintenon sent for him. She herself was resolutely casting off the yoke of the Court confessors. The Recollet heard the dying woman's confession and admonished her. The Dauphine spoke just once again, to ask for the prayers for the dying. They were said. Madame de Maintenon, clasping the dying hand of the Princess she had dandled as a child upon her knees, spoke the responses.

Once more, in obedience to custom, the King retired before the last breath was drawn. He got into his coach with Madame de Maintenon. He sought refuge at Marly. Once more Madame de Maintenon, shut up with him in her room, saw his tears flow. This was more than a mere natural emotion, it was a downright anguish, the only real one, Saint-Simon tells us—and we may well believe him—the King had ever known.

On the morrow, the Dauphin, shaking with fever, joined them at Marly. It had been impossible to conceal the Dauphine's death from him. He had loved her. The most intense sorrow overwhelmed him. Seeing him shivering, his physician ordered him to bed. Madame de Maintenon proceeded to his bedside at once. The night passed. Early next morning he was informed that the King was awake. Then the Dauphin left his bed; he had enough strength left to walk, though all bowed down, to his grandfather's room. The moment the King saw him, he held out his arms and folded him in a long and tender embrace. There were red patches all over the Dauphin's face. He replied with affectionate gentleness to the King's remarks; then he returned to his own rooms, went to bed, said to Boudin, the physician, "I feel I am stricken," and reminded him of a certain prophetic warning as to his fate which Boudin himself, a great reader of future events, had received on a past occasion. The same patches as those on the Dauphine's face were found all over his body. From this time forward, the sick man was absorbed in prayer. Monsieur and Madame de Chevreuse were present. Saint-Simon, the Dauphin's friend and counsellor, wandered about outside the room, in a most cruel state of alarm. The King and Madame de Maintenon, in turn, sat close beside the bed. On February 18th, after long conference with his confessor, the Dauphin heard Mass, and received the Communion. At eight o'clock he breathed his last.

The King, feeling, perhaps, that he could not always disappear like a fugitive from the presence of death, stayed on at Marly. The Dauphin's corpse was conveyed to Versailles. The Dauphine's coffin was there already. The two were laid side by side on the same platform, in the great cabinet of the apartment of the dead Princess. On the night of February 28th their two hearts were taken together to the

Val-de-Grâce. The two coffins were carried on the same four-wheeled car across a sleeping Paris, and in the darkness of the night, lit up only by their flaming torches, the Monks of Saint-Denis received them at the last.

Then only did the King take his way back to Versailles. We will leave Saint-Simon to describe the funeral etiquette, the rows of courtiers and titled ladies in their long cloaks and mourning mantles, bending low before the King, as he moves slowly, a trifle bent, but calm as ever, to his own apartments, greeting each person with a glance. He retires to Madame de Maintenon's lodging, and there, in that room within whose walls the monarch can pour out his grief, with none to hear its echo, in the arms of his peerless friend, that room in which they have learnt to know the emptiness of all their hopes, and wept the silent tears of age for the children their willing hands had moulded and trained up for France, their life resumes its course.

The Duc and the Duchesse de Bourgogne left two sons: the Duc de Bretagne was five years old, the Duc d'Anjou still at his nurse's breast. The King announced his wish that the Duc de Bretagne should from that time forward be styled the Dauphin.

The very next day the Dauphin sickened, and his brother too. Patches exactly the same as those observed on their father's body made their appearance; the two children had only been anointed. Both were now hastily baptized. The King, foreseeing, no doubt, the death of the elder boy, commanded the Duchesse de Ventadour, their Governess, to give each child the same name, Louis. The elder of the children died that night; the third Dauphin of France to die within the year!

Then a rumour sprang up, and waxed louder and louder; the ominous word "poison" was first pronounced by Boudin, Monseigneur's own physician. The King had given orders that the bodies should be opened; he now called for the physicians' verdict. There was evidence of blood-poisoning in each case. Fagon, the King's physician, and Boudin both declared there had been foul play, and said it openly.

Maréchal, the King's second physician, was not so certain. He asserted he had noticed the same signs in the corpses of patients whose natural death from infectious disease it was not possible to doubt. He boldly discussed the matter, demonstrating the fact that to assert that poison had been used would do an undoubted mischief, which could not avenge an unproved crime. Yet he was uneasy himself. One name was on every lip, that of the Duc d'Orléans, a man who sought counsel from the stars, and had been seen hanging, after some orgy, over magic vessels, or gazing into mirrors enveloped in strange vapours, calling up the Demon, questioning the Future. Six years previously, when reverses were falling thick upon his cousin, the King of Spain, the Duc d'Orléans had seemed to be lying in wait to snatch the Spanish throne. The King had been aware of it, but he had held his peace. He had even married his grandson, the Duc de Berry, to the Duc d'Orléans' daughter. But his feeling for this nephew, who, out of sheer bravado, deliberately proclaimed his own impiety and debaucheries, was one of cold repugnance; as for Madame de Maintenon, she looked on the elegant cynic as the very incarnation of all evil. He jeered at a God who left his faithful servants to suffer, openly avowed his own belief in the Devil, made a compact with the Evil One, parodied the acts of worship, cast bold and impious glances into futurity. A sort of sulphureous and poisonous odour, a baleful influence, hung about him. He terrified the populace, which mourned its princes, and shook angry fists at the infidel, shouting noisy accusations. One more stroke from Death's scythe, and the crown would be on the Duc de Berry's head: that crazy, vicious woman, whom every one despised, the Duchesse de Berry, daughter of the Duc d'Orléans, would be Queen of France!

From Versailles the poison rumour found its way to Paris, thence to the provinces; a horrified whisper sped in all directions. Round the Palais-Royal the mob surged to and fro, half demented, uttering wild threats. The King maintained his impassive silence. What did he believe? And Madame de Maintenon? She was stiff as any mummy whenever she had dealings with the Duc d'Orléans. Three times already this idea of poison had been the all-too-vivid nightmare of the sovereign's reign. Deeply disturbed, but unconvinced, the King performed his royal functions like some high-priest who must needs drown his own emotions, his antipathies, his suffering, in the regular performance of his ritual duties. It was only remarked that his visits to Madame de Maintenon were growing more and more assiduous, that he immured himself for ever-lengthening periods in that sanctuary; in the literal sense she was his shadow. When he had no special evening business to transact, he would remain with her from three o'clock in the afternoon till ten at night. The bands of courtiers wandering up and down the galleries could hear the violins and hautboys playing Lulli's calm and delightful music behind the closed doors of Madame de Maintenon's room. She did everything she could think of to distract the King's thoughts; they had nothing to say to each other, too much to think about; the music filled up their tragic silences; the courtiers seemed to find a grisly pleasure in marking the King's nephew with the stigma of the shameful suspicion under which he laboured; there was vacancy all round the Duc d'Orléans; a ring of reprobation seemed to hem him in; the courtiers sank, as it were, into the fabric of the walls, when he passed by.

In the course of that same year, the Duc de Berry was stricken, so Saint-Simon tells us, with the malady that had carried off his brother. The same remedies, the same violent emetics, were administered; the blood obtained by bleeding the patient was at once declared to be "poisoned." Like his brother the Duc de Bourgogne, the Duc de Berry passed quietly and piously away.

And that same year again, dispatches from Madrid brought news of the death of the young Queen of Spain. The two sisters, whose crowns were to have been sisters too, lay each in her grave, one at Saint-Denis, the other at the Escurial. All the aims and all the dreams had faded into death. At Madrid, too, the evil-sounding word "poison" was whispered. The death of a Queen who had loved France too well was ascribed to the Comtesse de Soissons. Neither Madame de Maintenon nor the Princesse des Ursins ever made the remotest reference, in any of their letters, to the rumour of this crime. Were they too proud to notice such hideous tales? Were they acting under orders? How many things have been asserted by those who had no knowledge at all, how many more have never been mentioned by those who knew! The Princess wrote that her King, "resolved to lead a virtuous life," was thinking of marrying again. He did marry again, indeed, and before the new Queen reached Madrid, before she had even seen her husband, on the very day of her first meeting with the Princess, she inflicted the most insulting humiliation on the passionately devoted old servant who had acted as her princes' mother, grandmother, minister, handmaid, prophetess.

At Versailles the King, weary of all this death, and feeling the tide of mourning rise ever higher about him, withdrew entirely into the intimacy of his life with Madame de Maintenon. There lay his confidence, there he found repose. Together they could contemplate the terrible harvest death had reaped; their thoughts had already passed beyond the tomb. That which they had dreaded most of all had now become their inevitable fate; the Regency of the infidel. Maréchal, that honest physician, did his utmost to destroy the doubt that tainted the palace atmosphere. But he could not succeed. By an effort of their own wills, the King and Madame de Maintenon refused to accept the horrible suspicion; but they felt the uneasiness it caused. The King forced himself to be calm; he looked like a stone, in his impassive majesty. After the Duc de Berry's death, he refused all complimentary condolences and deputations; funeral rites, backs bowed under the tremendous thunderbolts of fate—these had become ridiculous. He forbade all mourning draperies. He was seen driving himself about in his own *calèche*, as usual. He dined in public, his gold *cadenas* set in front of him. Every day the Duc d'Orléans, monosyllabic, faultlessly deferential, came to pay his duty to the King. Nobody who saw him—impassive as the King himself—knew whether his attitude denoted pride stung by suspicion, or sheer defiance. The King kept his countenance, nobly, proudly, in the face of this living riddle. He was resolved not to believe. His sole means of preserving his own dignity and majesty lay in an apparent confidence sheltered by his deliberate silence.

We know now that the princes were "poisoned" by the overpowering infection of a malignant form of measles. The King revealed his inmost and his just conviction in a moment of confidence, one evening, when, after long wavering between suspicion and the horror the suspicion caused him, he admitted at last that Maréchal was right, and added, "My nephew is a braggart of his crimes!"

So he did not hold him guilty. But the King was determined he would take precautions against this braggart of his crimes.

CHAPTER XII

DEATH OF THE KING—MADAME DE MAINTENON IN RETIREMENT HER DEATH

The King's last will: Madame de Maintenon's influence with regard to it—Death of Louis XIV—Madame de Maintenon retires to Saint-Cyr—The Duc d'Orléans pays her a visit—Her solitude—Her old age—Her days at Saint-Cyr—Her letters—Her death.

THE Princess Palatine wrote one day, after her son had become Regent, to the Landgravine of Hesse, "I do not know whether my son will be King!" Louis XIV, too, must have asked himself, in the course of his meditations, whether the Duc d'Orléans would be Regent or King. The children of the royal house had been swept away by what resembled a deliberate and merciless decree of Fate. Would the same fate pursue, even to the bitter end, the mysterious designs whose object, devilish or divine, was hidden from human sight?

Louis XIV had reached his seventy-sixth year. He was lost in thought. The expression of the King's face, full of the sorrow he kept under, betrayed his silent sadness. More constantly than ever he took refuge in the artificial family life he had laboriously created for himself. In that *privance*—to adopt the term peculiar to the period, which so justly indicates the transition from a life of politics and royal duties to the ordinary human existence—he breathed freely. Madame de Maintenon, bending over her spinning-wheel, still longed to take her way to Saint-Cyr. Two old people who have witnessed unexampled misfortune close around them may con together, with a certain pleasure, the page that records the melancholy thoughts they share. The monarch's aged companion did her utmost to collect some elements of entertainment in her room. The King's faint smile was only stirred by what her faithful hand might offer him. The Marquise d'O, Madame d'Heudicourt, Madame de Dangeau, would come; Madame de Caylus, who, after flirtations that had been severely blamed, and some small amount of penitence, had grown both steady and devout, was also admitted to the grief-stricken circle. There was little talk. In spite of trials not unlike the Psalmist's, the King retained his unaffected gentle ways; silence and solitude were his great remedy. The memory of the Duchesse de Bourgogne, that *fleur-de-lys* so cruelly cut down, was always present. They would recall her frolics, her laughter, her fond, engaging ways with the King and with her "aunt." In this intimate intercourse the King realized the meaning of the link that bound him to his matchless friend. She had known and strengthened all his maturer life, she had loved, like the tenderest mother, the young princess who had been dear to him as his own daughter, the hope of his middle life. Now everything they had both cherished, all the plans prepared in their secret hearts, had faded away. The future, which should have united their two names in the annals of a reign spent in doing good, would speak only, and that with astonishment and offence, of the bond between the King and one of his own subjects, and declare it "unbelievable."

It was noticed that while the long afternoons of music, *grande et petite*, wore away, the advent of the Duc du Maine, limping on his stick through the door of one of the cabinets of the King's private apartments, would always bring back a smile to the King's face. His lively talk still entertained the King. The Duc du Maine brought the Court rumours with him, and, as though in spite of himself, would always return to the fatal subject which, though it was banished from conversation, still filled every mind: the poison mystery. He made no definite accusation against the Duc d'Orléans, the King would not have permitted it. But when he reported the remarks overheard in the Palace corridors, he allowed it to be understood that doubt and accusation were taking yet clearer shape around the "braggart of his crimes." The

Duc d'Orléans only sneered at the never-ending suspicions; he ended by pointing the finger at himself, in sheer bravado, gave himself over to loose women, plunged into orgies in the course of which he summoned the evil spirit to appear under the blazing waxlights of the girandoles. His widowed daughter, the unworthy darling of her father's heart, led a life of debauchery at his side.

Realizing that this nephew, at once suspected and suspect, must inevitably be either his successor or else the Regent of the kingdom, the King felt his repugnance grow more inveterate every day. And while, step by step, the Duc d'Orléans drew ever nearer to the throne, the King, in his turn, as he listened to the Duc du Maine, began to meditate some action which should check his corrupt kinsman's threatening advance along the road to sovereignty.

The Duc de Berry had died on May 3, 1714. At once the old King revealed the direction his thoughts were taking. He announced the promotion of his two bastard sons to the rank of Princes of the Blood, and conferred the right of eligibility for the throne upon them. At that moment all the Princes of the Blood were children; thus, after the Duc d'Orléans, the bastards would be first in the order of succession, their distrustful eyes would be upon him, keeping perpetual watch. Here were the firstfruits of the Duc du Maine's admission into the King's private circle. Once Madame de Montespan's sons were eligible for the crown, they attained the rank their sisters already enjoyed, thanks to their marriages with authentic Princes of the royal blood. And further, the King thought (and Madame de Maintenon, no doubt, agreed with him, for the whole plan was elaborated in their private rooms) that when he placed a man baseborn, indeed, but his much-loved son, an upright man, in the position of counsellor to the royal family, he thereby secured a protection for the Dauphin's cradle. The King did not believe, and yet he felt a dread; he fancied he saw serpents crawling round that baby's couch.

The Comte de Toulouse, younger brother of the Duc du Maine, disarmed even the bastards' enemies by his loyal, modest, peaceable nature. Madame de Maintenon's pupils knew how to conduct themselves. The King, who had reigned for over sixty-two years, had a confused idea that his crown was his own property, and that he was free, if not to bequeath it, at least to protect it after he himself was dead; and his heart was set on his bastard sons.

The decree that made the brothers eligible for the crown was signed on July 29th. Within a month the old King, still pursuing his meditations, drew a step nearer to his natural sons. He looked sadder every day, and more reserved. He was literally wasting away, and he was fully conscious of it. On August 27th he summoned Mesmes, the First President of the Parliament, and d'Aguesseau, the Attorney-General, to his cabinet. He was sitting there alone, bending over his great writing-table. Opening a drawer, he took out a voluminous packet bearing seven seals, and in a voice at once solemn and weary, he said, "Gentlemen, this is my will. Nobody but myself knows its contents. I hand it over to you, to be kept by Parliament." He gave instructions that a hiding-place should be hollowed out in one of the towers of the building, and the packet built into the wall; there it was to lie until he died. He had no trust in anything but the shadow of those ancient walls to guard the secret of his last commands.

By this will the King provided, as we know, for his own posthumous rule through that of the infant King. As long as the little Dauphin (already he was beginning to call him "the King") was a minor, there was to be a Regency, but no Regent. The Duc d'Orléans was only to be President of the Council of Regency. On this council the Duc du Maine, the Comte de Toulouse, and other faithful followers mentioned by the King, were to have seats. The King's old friend and brother-in-arms, the Duc de Villeroy, was to keep jealous watch over the child. Louis XIV refused, in fact, to die; he still remained the man who had never been allowed to see death face to face.

The third and final step was the codicil written by his dying hand, which contains the clearest indication of the nature of his protracted ruminations, and, no doubt, of the secret and confidential discussions of the last months of his life. This time the Duc du Maine was to reach the very centre of the fort. By this codicil, the King gave him a crowning proof of confidence; he was appointed guardian of the royal child. He was to superintend the young King's education, he was to be at the head of his civil and military households, he was to command all the troops in Paris. What, save distrust of the Duc d'Orléans, did this extraordinary confidence in another person betoken?

Maréchal had said—when Fagon and Boudin, after finding the poor Duc de Bourgogne's heart a mass of corruption in his body, began to wrangle in Madame de Maintenon's presence and his own, crying out like madmen that the Prince had been poisoned—that to persuade the King the children he was mourning had been murdered, was to "assassinate" the sovereign, to embitter the rest of his life, and even his death, without any possibility of proving the assertion to be true. The growing strength of the King's suspicions is evidenced by the fact that, though he brought no accusation against the Duc d'Orléans, he took no steps to clear him. His nephew offered, one day, to enter the Bastille, and there submit, with Humbert (the scientific chemist who prepared the powders used by the inquirer for his experiments connected with the mysteries of magic), to a full investigation. The King, so the Duc d'Orléans himself informs us, made no reply, and merely looked at him "with disdain."

At the same time, every precaution against the legitimate representative of the hereditary principle had been taken, by secret and successive measures. In all these we note the silent working of the selfsame thought: to snatch the royal person and the royal mind from the Duc d'Orléan's hands, to keep all poison, of the body or the soul, far from those infant lips, to bring the other uncle, who was his guardian, ever nearer to him. The first stood for the principle of legitimacy, but the monarch dreaded the satanic influence of his person. The second, in spite of the stain upon his birth, he regarded as an honest man, a faithful son, to whom his father, before the last great silence fell upon him, was conveying his last instructions.

What was Madame de Maintenon's opinion of the dilemma and its disturbing effect upon an unchanging principle? What was her share in the King's final decision?

A specific answer to the question is not easily discovered, but there is no difficulty about conceiving one. During the period ensuing on his bereavements, the King habitually joined Madame de Maintenon at about three o'clock in the afternoon, and left her at ten o'clock at night, when he went to supper. Quite possibly nothing was said about the tenor of the King's will. The King was an extremely silent man; there was a royal sense of right and wrong within him of which Madame de Maintenon was well aware, and on which she never intruded. When the King said to Mesmes, " This is my will, nobody knows its contents," he was probably speaking the truth. His very pride would have prevented him from telling a lie.

But though Madame de Maintenon possessed no explicit knowledge of the contents of that sealed packet, it is more than probable that she understood and approved them. The solution bears too close a resemblance to that she would herself have suggested. In her mind, the moral principle outweighed every other; the political principle lagged far behind it. If the King did consult her as to the dilemma between opposing principles and personalities that was causing him so much trouble, she must have been inclined to favour the Duc du Maine, whose character her Christian hands had striven to mould, and the stain on whose birth she had done her best to cleanse. They knew him to be an expedient, nothing more. The King, in his cabinet at Marly, had told his son that " the more he did for his legitimized children, the more they must labour in fear to make themselves worthy of it, so that they might be able to keep the position in which he had placed them after his departure—a thing that could only be expected as a consequence of their own worth." This was the doctrine Madame de Maintenon had always impressed upon her pupil; the princes' rights were theirs thanks to the regular order of their birth, and they need have no fear of losing them; but he, the legitimized Prince, with his irregular birth, would have to conquer everything afresh; this necessity that he should conquer his own reputation as a man of worth was at once his weakness and his strength. He was in the position of a man who bears his burden of original sin, and who can and must free himself from it. Madame de Maintenon, with her well-balanced mind, would rather have seen power in the hands of a bastard cleansed from his taint, than in those of a corrupt prince, even though he were legitimate. She had lived so close to this royal family—now become a sequence, rather than a family, thanks to the King's process of amalgamation—that she never looked beyond the individuality of the persons composing it, sought only for the least damaged fruit the tree might bear. Her great familiarity with conventual life, the mental attitude she had consequently assumed, made it quite natural, to her, that authority and influence should pass out of one person's hands and into another's. She would have been quite content to see the Regent of the kingdom appointed just like a Bishop, or the Abbot of an important Abbey, on account of his virtues, not his birth. The corollary of Divine Right—if indeed she believed in its existence at the bottom of her heart—must necessarily be an upright life on the part of the prince who claimed it.

And to conclude, there was one man, among the persons about the King, now so near his end, who was in a position to approach the royal conscience more nearly than any other; this was the Père Le Tellier, his confessor. Madame de Maintenon had had no hand in his selection. No trace of what the confessor's action may have been remains to us. The council of the King's conscience has not revealed its secret. Let us beware of our own tendency towards writing history founded on the documents we possess; let us give a thought, now and then, to all those we do not possess, and to all the things that have never been written down at all. We may well believe that when the King and the Jesuit were closeted together every Friday, the confessor reached an understanding of the perplexities assailing that uneasy conscience, and helped his penitent to solve them. What did the hidden censor, accustomed, in those most private conversations, to use his sacred right of criticism upon the King's actions and his very thoughts, think of the Regency of an infidel? Le Tellier (son of a Norman peasant) may not have raised his voice, but even at a Court where no woman below the rank of a duchess had a right to a seat, he could speak with the authority conferred on him by the Order of which he was a member. We will make no definite statement, for we possess no certainty; but when our thoughts turn to that final picture of the King, just after he had made his will, saying, one evening, to the Queen of England, in a tone so wrathful that it startled her, "I have made my will! They would have it so!" let us not forget the confidant of all his sorrows, his counsellor, his confessor.

By tacit agreement, then, all those who were nearest to the King unanimously approved of his decision. God was his witness that his sole desire was the good and the safety of the young child called to the formidable duties of a sovereign. With this object he had set forth his wishes; when he died, the will would be extracted from its niche behind the mortared stones; Parliament would then decide the matter. Perhaps the King was not deceived. It was God who was proposing, this time, through his hand; the disposing would be in the hands of men.

The period of his long and gloomy meditations was ended now; as far as might be, and by such means as were at hand, bounds had been set to the disaster death had wrought. The King felt himself growing weaker; he was literally fading away. He cast an indifferent glance upon the Dutch gazettes, with their reports of the London betting on his approaching death. Fagon and Maréchal scouted the idea of danger, desperately. Madame de Maintenon's sealed lips discouraged all indiscreet expressions of alarm. Were the physicians really deceived? Did they believe him immortal, as he would have desired?

On Saturday, August 10, 1715, Louis XIV spent his afternoon walking in the gardens at Marly, and returned to Versailles in the evening. The next day, Sunday, he went to the Trianon, did some more work with the Attorney-General, and discussed certain religious business with him. On August 12th he complained of sciatic pains in his leg and thigh; this was the fatal warning. On the 13th he had himself carried to the audience chamber, and there, standing on his feet, without any support whatever, he received a so-called Persian ambassador—an impostor. This done, he held his Financial Council, and spent his evening with Madame de Maintenon, listening to the violins; the clear notes of the music dispersed and drove away the shadows of impending dissolution. On the 14th he had himself carried, again, into the chapel, where he heard Mass, and afterwards to Madame de Maintenon's rooms, where the *grande musique* was performed. There was *petite musique* again on the 15th, and *grande musique* on the 16th; the rhythm of the daily existence never broke; the cadence of the music, brilliant, recurrent, marked the time for Death's oncoming footsteps. The King, wasted and withered as he had grown, still smiled, ever so faintly, when he heard those airs of Lully's which had been the delight of his young days.

On the 17th, in his bed, he once more transacted business; there was music in the morning, when he woke, and music again at night in Madame de Maintenon's rooms. The malady was making evident strides. After August 20th the King did not leave his bed. Fagon slept in his room. By the King's orders, a bed was prepared for Madame de Maintenon in the room next to his own; she lay down on it between her spells of watching. Mademoiselle d'Aumale, who never left her, had her armchair in the same little room. On the 24th, the King held a council with his ministers, and when evening came he insisted, in spite of his great suffering, on making a last effort to leave his bed and dine in public. Those in attendance on him remarked that the fact of being looked at caused him distress. Quite late that evening he grew suddenly worse. Leaning over him, as he lay gasping under the feathered canopy of his bed, Madame de Maintenon broke the silence behind which the King had seemed to shut death away from him. The hour had struck when all veils must be torn asunder, and truth must stand revealed.

And at once, in the presence of them all, the aged wife performed the closing act of the service she had always held to be her special mission; she never left the room, nor the King's bedside, again; she was the Minister of Death. She it was who suggested that the King should receive the sacraments. He answered, quietly, that he did not feel he was absolutely at the worst, but that indeed it was always a good thing to do. She helped him to examine his own conscience, and, that precise and reliable witness Mademoiselle d'Aumale assures us, reminded him of several trifling faults she had seen him commit; then she drew back and left the room. The Père Le Tellier was just entering it; she did not speak to him.

In the Palace of Versailles the humming murmur that was apt to attend a death within its precincts was beginning to rise. From one apartment to another the whisper ran, louder and louder, like the rising wind that precedes a thunderstorm. Saint-Simon, closeted with the Duc d'Orléans, and guessing the intolerable piece of usurpation planned by the King in his bereavement and his fears for the future, was applying all his sense of fairness, all his passionate devotion, all the nobility inherent in his blood, all his cunning, all his intelligence, to the service of the legitimate representative of the most unvarying of principles.

The flood of courtiers surged to and fro between the room in which the King lay dying and the apartments of the future Regent, between the dying master and the new one, according as the varying rumours as to the progress of the illness gave more or less precarious hope of improvement. The Duc d'Orléans, certain of his own right, though uncertain as to the tenor of the King's will, looked with cold, ironic eyes on the crowd that ebbed and flowed, in its inability to discern where life or death might be. A rumour spread, one morning, that the King was mending; the Duc d'Orléans reckoned up the modest number of his visitors, that day, and said, with a scornful smile, "If the King dines once again, I shall be left alone!"

The King's daughters, the Duchesse du Maine, came hurrying from Sceaux and Chantilly with their sons and daughters and their attendants, and took noisy possession of their apartments at Versailles, there to await the summons to the dying bed. On August 25th the surgeons made incisions in the King's legs. They found the blood was full of gangrene; they abandoned their last hope.

The King realized it, and quietly made himself over to the urgent hand of Death. His last days, his closing hours, were full of the sweet and simple glory of a setting sun. He was true to his royal blood. In one moment he laid down the sceptre he had borne so long. Speaking of the baby Duc d'Anjou, he said, quietly, "the young King." Of himself, they heard him whisper, "When I was King." On the very day before he died he had a business conversation with the Chancellor, during which he dictated the second codicil, which appointed the Père Le Tellier the young King's confessor. Madame de Maintenon certainly had nothing to do with this final order; the King's confessor was no favourite of hers. The King asked her to go through his private papers with him, saying he did not wish to leave anything behind him that was likely to cause differences between those who had served him. He and she were left alone together, save for Mademoiselle d'Aumale. The King desired Madame de Maintenon to burn certain bundles of letters—they may have been those she herself had written to him—and not one of them remains. To Mademoiselle d'Aumale he handed over all sorts of unimportant papers, that he looked over with a smile: lists of invitations to Marly and Fontainebleau. He found his rosary, and gave it to Madame de Maintenon, saying, "It is not a relic, it is a keepsake!" and taking up his bonbonnière, he held it out, with that gracious civility that had never overlooked any person nor anything, to Mademoiselle d'Aumale.

Then the dying King took leave of Madame de Maintenon.

Mademoiselle d'Aumale, who was in the room, a little distance from them, and heard it all, has written the conversation down for us. This account Madame de Maintenon placed, in its original form, with her own will. The King told her that his sole regret in dying was that he must leave her. Madame de Maintenon, whose one anxiety, in this his dying hour, was that he should detach himself completely and deliberately from the world, replied that she besought him only to think of God, " that he must not give a thought, now, to any one but Him." Her voice did not shake, she shed no tears, she was absorbed in her last duty. The King " begged her to forgive him for not having lived in greater kindness with her; he was sorry," he said, " that he had not made her happy, but he assured her that he had always loved and esteemed her equally."

He was sorry he had not made her happy! Let us note the simple modesty of the phrase. No doubt the memory of all the melancholy that had overwhelmed her, all the constraint she had endured, was painful to them both. When the King spoke of his regret at not having made her happy, tears trickled from his eyes, and in his distress at having betrayed his emotion, he immediately asked Madame de Maintenon whether there was anybody in the room. She answered " No "! This " No " seemed to calm him. The curtains, which were lowered round his bed, hid him from sight. The princes and the courtiers crowded the adjoining room, but none of them entered the death-chamber. The King spoke again. " After all," he said, " even if I were seen to be affected when I spoke to you, nobody would be surprised! " Then Madame de Maintenon, fearing the weakening effect of tears upon the dying man, quitted the room.

She came back. They were still alone, save for Mademoiselle d'Aumale. The King said, " What will become of you, Madame? You have nothing! " " I am nothing," she replied. " Think only of God! " And she left him. She went a few steps, and then, remembering (as she afterwards told Mademoiselle d'Aumale) her state of uncertainty as to the treatment the Princes might mete out to her, she returned to the King's bedside, and asked him to beg the Duc d'Orléans to treat her with consideration, no more; he promised her he would do it.

" Think only of God," she had said at first. But remembering her eighty years, an apprehension as to her own fate had fallen upon her; the terror of an old woman who felt hatred about her, on every side, drove her back to that bedside.

Then she left the King, and retired with her companion to her own apartments, where they both betook them to their prayers. Now that the King had finished all the matters of his private life, he ordered his door to be opened to let in the flood, and took his leave of the Dauphin, the Princes, the Princesses, the highest dignitaries of the Church of France. The little Dauphin was carried in by his Governess, the Duchesse de Ventadour, and set down on the King's bed, into his arms; the King said to him, " My child, you are going to be a great King; do not imitate me in the taste I have had for making war; think always of submitting your actions to God. Teach your subjects to honour Him. I give you the Père Le Tellier to be your Confessor; never forget the gratitude you owe to Madame de Ventadour. I cannot tell you how great mine is to her." He kissed the boy, and watched him as he went away, with a prayer on his lips, and a gesture as though he would have blessed him. The faithful violins still made their music in the courtyard below.

Then the Princes, the Dukes, and the noblemen who were in the King's room, but parted from him by the drawn curtains, were conducted to his bedside. The King's voice, still strong, broke on the solemn silence. " Gentlemen," he said, " I ask your pardon for the bad example I have set you. I have to thank you greatly for the manner in which you have served me, for the attachment and fidelity you have all shown me. I am very sorry not to have done all I should have desired to do for you. I ask you to give my grandson the same diligence and the same fidelity as you have bestowed on me. I hope you will all do your part to preserve union, and that if any one of you should deviate from it, you will help to bring him back. I feel my emotion is overcoming me and you too. I beg you will excuse me. Fare you well, Gentlemen. I count on you sometimes to remember me!"

In the presence of them all, he solemnly bestowed the crowning proof of his "friendship and his confidence," the post of Governor to the young King, on the Maréchal de Villeroy. He was quite conscious that the choice of this tried friend argued a certain distrust of the Duc d'Orléans, for he added, "I hope my nephew will treat you with the consideration and confidence he ought to feel for a man who has always been dear to me."

The three bastard Princesses now entered the room, the Princesse de Conti, the Duchesse d'Orléans, and Madame la Duchesse; he bade them come close to him, and when they evinced their grief by noisy weeping he smiled a faint smile and said, "You must not make so much noise!" And he exhorted them to live together peaceably.

Last of all he was left face to face with the man who, since the deaths of the two Dauphins and the Duc de Berry, had inflicted perpetual wounds upon his heart, his pride, his power, and filled him with that kingly suffering which he had hidden under his resolve not to inflict any public mark of opprobrium on his nephew. No witness was present at their conversation. We only know what the Duc d'Orléans subsequently related of it. Did the King really assure him he had always cared for him, that he had not wronged him, that the arrangements he had made would prove it to him? This false statement, which the very morrow was to see exposed, astounds us. The King spoke to him of Madame de Maintenon. These, says Mademoiselle d'Aumale, were his very words, as the Duc d'Orléans reported them: "Nephew, I commend Madame de Maintenon to you. You know the esteem and regard in which I have always held her; she has never given me any but good advice, she has been useful to me in all things, but especially as to my salvation. Do all she may ask of you, for herself, her relations, her connections, her friends. She will never impose on your kindness; let her appeal to you for anything she may desire."

With his usual cold and correct reserve, the Duc d'Orléans listened to the King's farewell words. The conversation was a short one. He took his way back, forthwith, to the counsellors who were feverishly preparing his revenge—the quashing of the King's will. The crowd gathered in the corridors and rooms of the Palace now watched intently for news that the last breath was drawn.

Then Madame de Maintenon went back to the King's bedside. Leaning over the dying man, she spoke to him of God. The King said to her, " I have offended God sorely, Madame, but He is very good, perhaps he will have mercy on me; I am even told I may hope so; I confess I am beginning to think it is not so difficult to die as people fancy." " It is not easy for everyone," she replied, " when one has to begin the catechism with a dying person who has lived in infidelity all his life, who clings to earthly ties, who has hatreds in his heart, or has to make restitution." " Ah ! " said the King, " I have none of that to make to any private person; but for what concerns the kingdom, I have no resource but to trust in the mercy of God ! " The hour had come for him when a man may repent his faults, but not repair them.

In the solemn silence that hangs over a dying bed, Madame de Maintenon, too, might look back over her past life, and taste the bitterness of the hour that was upon her. What was the object for which she had striven through the whole course of her long mission? She had desired the King's salvation in the other world. Seeing how Christian and repentant his spirit was, she trusted God's great mercy to grant her this; but for eighteen years she had nursed another hope, that of training up the future Queen of France, of bearing her own part even, perchance, in human memory, in a reign of wisdom and of charity destined to repair the destruction wrought by the reign of glory. If the Duc de Bourgogne, if his young wife, had knelt with her beside that dying bed, how different it would all have been ! What hopes would have cheered her heart! She would have been a mother still—an "aunt," at all events—esteemed, consulted, she would have seen the triumph of her own teachings. After that vision of departed hopes, what must the return to reality have been!

The Duc de Villeroy's coach stands harnessed in the courtyard of the Palace, ready for what is to be almost a flight. From the new masters she can hope for nothing but cold irony. She has seen the insulting pamphlets from Holland, the anonymous letters, the ribald songs; she knows that in their misery the very poor she has so loved and protected have let themselves be persuaded to accept the wildest tales; that she has been buying up the corn, piling up heaps of gold. Along that road to Saint-Cyr she was about to travel for the last time, the Duc de Villeroy, dramatically ostentatious in his suspicion and distrust, had posted sentries to ensure her unmolested arrival at her final refuge.

Did the thought of finding herself alone among these new masters terrify her? Was she simply acting in obedience to the custom by which the nearest of kin always retired before death actually occurred? On August 28th, seeing the sick man fall into unconsciousness, she expressed a wish to go to Saint-Cyr. She consulted her confessor, the Père Briderey, begging him to go and look at the dying man, and come back to assure her she could do nothing more for him; the priest went, returned, and said, in answer to her unspoken thought, "You are no longer necessary to him."

Then she entered Villeroy's coach, and departed to Saint-Cyr with Mademoiselle d'Aumale. From one quarter of an hour to another, the Maréchal's couriers brought her news. The King's strength revived. A rustic had made his appearance, bringing an elixir; the King had swallowed some of it, he had recovered consciousness. Instantly Madame de Maintenon called for the coach, got into it, went back to the Palace. For the last time the King recognized the presence of the one friend of his long life and of his closing moments, and seeing her leaning over him, he whispered, "You must have a great deal of courage and of affection for me to make you stay there so long!" Then, a moment afterwards, "Do not stay any longer, Madame, it is a very sad sight; it will soon be over, I hope!"

Once more he lost consciousness; and then, worn out, "bursting into tears," says her companion, bowed down, Madame de Maintenon quitted the death-chamber, while the Princes crowded about the dying man, whose eyes were closing fast, to claim the rights and privileges of their various ranks in the ceremonial of the monarch's death. As far as it affected her, all was over now; she had only one thought, to get out of sight, and both fidelity and pride had a share in this desire; by staying she would have seemed to affirm her claim as wife and widow. Once more she sent back Mademoiselle d'Aumale, who slipped to the bedside within the curtains, and looked at the King; he had already passed into the shadow; she could hear his hard-drawn breaths. Mademoiselle d'Aumale returned to Madame de Maintenon and said, "He is just as you left him." Then the two women, the younger one supporting her companion, passed down the staircase. Nobody attended them; unnoticed, just as the King was rendering up his soul to God, the King's shadow passed out of sight.

On September 2nd, the morrow of her second return to Saint-Cyr, she was in her room, when Mademoiselle d'Aumale entered it, at half-past eight in the morning, and said to her, quite simply, "Madame, the whole household is at prayers in the chapel." She understood . . . they were saying the prayers for the dead. Leaning on her young companion's shoulder, she traversed the distance of three hundred paces that lay between her own room and the chapel. The clear voices of the nuns and the young girls were just beginning the Office for the Dead. No tears, no condolences—prayer, first of all. Bowed low over her *prie-dieu*, Madame de Maintenon knelt with the rest. Presently the nuns proceeded to their chapter-hall. There she joined them, and then tears were shed and words were spoken. Some memory there may have been of what the King had said one day, when he was departing to Mons. "I leave you, Ladies, that which

I love best!" Could his shade have shown itself in that familiar place, it would surely have reiterated the words. Everyone felt it. In that very hour the Duc d'Orléans was persuading Parliament to quash the will just drawn out of its walled-up niche. At Versailles the Great King's reign was ended; here, in this secluded home which the departed King would surely protect and visit yet again, the last kingdom over which he was to rule, it lived on in faithful hearts.

On the very first day, Madame de Maintenon insisted on seeing the young pupils. They all filed past her, in blue, in yellow, in green, the littlest ones in red. "Here are many fatherless children!" she said. The smallest girls, touched with the infection of the tears about them, burst into loud sobs. Madame de Maintenon looked at them, greatly moved, and said, "From this time forward I will think of nothing but God and my children."

Then she went back into her *salon* hung with blue damask, and sent for the Archbishop of Rouen and the Bishop of Chartres, who were waiting to see her. As soon as her own Bishop—the Bishop of Chartres—entered the room, she fell on her knees and asked his blessing, adding, "I put myself into your hands; I shall die in them, seemingly." And when Monseigneur de Chartres would have given precedence to the Archbishop, Monseigneur de Rouen said, "You are her Bishop, give her your blessing."

On September 6th the Duc d'Orléans came to visit the recluse at Saint-Cyr. Madame de Maintenon received him, and thanked him for his act of courtesy, as for a sign of respect for the late King. He politely answered that he was doing it also out of regard for her.

The conversation that ensued was noted down by Madame de Maintenon's own hand. Reading the colloquy, we gain a clear idea of the speakers' mutual feelings; they spoke out frankly; they touched on the ominous rumours as to the use of poison.

"He told me," writes Madame de Maintenon, "that affairs would often call him to Paris, that he would do all in his power to bring them back into order, that this was his ambition, and that he would be more than happy if he could succeed, in a few years, in handing back the Kingdom to the young King in a better condition than that in which he had found it. I told him this was a glorious project." (Did her words hold a touch of irony? They were full of an icy reserve, in any case.) "He told me nobody had such an interest as himself in the preservation of the young Prince" (here we have his reply to the suspicions), "that the full authority was now his, and that he would be delighted to hand it over to him, and enjoy the honour and repose he would have earned for himself. I replied that if he did not possess the insatiable desire to reign of which he had always been accused, that which he had planned was a hundred times more glorious. He answered that if we were to lose the young King he would not be left to reign in peace, and there would be war with Spain."

Thus he laid stress on the fact that he had no interest in the young King's death. If Louis XV were to disappear, the boy's uncle, the King of Spain, would not leave the Regent to "reign in peace." Philippe V would abdicate his Spanish throne, withdraw his renunciation, and come forward, as the grandson of Louis XIV, to claim the throne of France.

Madame de Maintenon, in her turn, felt a suspicion in the air, and made an explanation of her own. "I begged him," she says, "never to listen to anything that might be imputed to me as regarded himself; that I knew what human spite was, that I had nothing more to say to him, that my one thought was to shut myself up, and that the very obligation I was under to him for a kindness he had promised me" (the continuation of her pension of 4000 *livres*), "sufficed to bind me in honour never to say or do anything against him; that I might yet be accused of doing business with Spain, but that all of it would be untrue, and that I should never give a thought to business again, except to pray for the prosperity of France."

Business with Spain! So she, too, had felt herself accused, in the Regent's sight; what an explanation, cloaked with all that courtesy!

" He asked permission to see the Ladies of the Community. I had the honour of conducting him to them. He said to them, ' I have asked leave to see you, Ladies, to assure you of the protection you will always find in me; I need not say anything to persuade you of this. That the King should have recommended you to me suffices. I shall always be ready to render you the services that may be within my power. I have come in person to assure you of this. I commend myself to your prayers, that God may grant me the strength and enlightenment I need to carry the terrible burden that has been laid upon me.' "

The Duc d'Orléans took his leave, and Madame deMaintenon instantly set down their conversation in writing, and placed the document with her will. This demonstrates the importance she attached to the words they had exchanged. She was very willing the attitude she had deliberately assumed should be made known. What was her inmost thought? Probably Mademoiselle d'Aumale gives a true rendering of the ideas and principles dictating Madame de Maintenon's conduct when she writes as follows with regard to the bereavements of the year 1712: " All these sudden and unexpected deaths produced a startling effect on every mind; they woke suspicions that charity forbids us to believe true."

Charity alone had forbidden their acceptance, in the past. As to the future, there was an honourable undertaking that nothing should be said. We may venture to believe that Madame de Maintenon, at the very bottom of her heart, felt the anguish of the doubt that may be traced in the tenor of her conversation with the Duc d'Orléans.

Close upon the Regent came Madame, in full dress and mourning mantle, to pay a ceremonious visit to the King's widow. In those days, politeness was the social discipline that maintained the rule of order and reason over hidden hatreds and black suspicions. On Madame's heels, the Princesses—the King's daughters and the Duchesse de Berry and the Duchesse du Maine—sought admittance; they came to see the widow, who had no love for them, draped in the livery of her melancholy state. Madame de Maintenon excused them from the performance of that ceremony; their coaches rolled back to Versailles.

And then began the great solitude she had chosen for herself. The visits of the Duc d'Orléans and of Madame sufficed to mark the nature of the mourning to which the King's widow had devoted her existence. She slipped completely out of sight, shut herself up. Her women cut the stitches that had held the gold embroideries on her skirts. She gave away her linen, her flowered muslin gowns, would keep nothing but her silver plate, her gold spoon and fork, her wearing apparel. She dismissed her servants, keeping only two waiting-women, and a lackey to do her commissions out of doors; sold her coach, set to work at once, with characteristic quiet and practical diligence, to draw up the lists of her pensions, and her charitable gifts to enable certain unmarried ladies to live outside the convent, and to her poor.

Her first letters to Madame de Caylus hardly contain a reference to the King's death, and the events which had sent her back into retirement among her daughters. Emotion, tears, the persons likely to call them forth, she shunned them all. The last duty she was able to render to the King was not to mourn him indiscreetly, but to labour obstinately for his salvation. The King was delivered from all suffering now. With her calm logic, she refused to see any sadness in death, after so long a life as hers. "How can anyone be afraid of dying?" she would say. "To me the thought is a delight!" And now, having reached the age of eighty, she was making herself ready to taste that delight.

There was a touch of fierceness, of inflexibility, about her longing for retirement. Her faithful friends, Madame de Dangeau, Madame de Ventadour, Madame d'O, who had been her familiar visitors at Saint-Cyr, in the King's time, begged leave to go and see her now. She would resort to subterfuge to escape their presence, even as they would use similar means to take her by surprise. When she did consent, it was done against her will, and with scant grace. The aged Madame de Dangeau, who had been her dearest friend, wrote her after one of these meetings: "How much have I regretted my sojourn at Saint-Cyr! Good Heavens! How happy I was there, save for the separation! That still hurts me, and it seems to me that we always part as if we had quarrelled. I have seen Madame la Duchesse de Noailles, who knew I had slept at Saint-Cyr, but the picture I drew her of my reception there has not given her any desire to expose herself to something similar. I told her all my tricks, how I had stayed alone in the courtyard, without my coach, at seven o'clock at night, in the open air; that I had scarcely seen you; that you had looked black at me; that Mademoiselle d'Aumale had been obliged to sleep on a straw mattress. She thought I had been extremely bold, and said, 'My aunt does not like that!'"

What did this inexorable resolve to hide herself portend? Her dread of old memories, of emotion, of useless tears, and to this dread was added her anxiety to maintain a perfect loyalty to Saint-Cyr. At the very outset she had accepted the title of Superioress of the Community; in this office, as in everything else in her half-religious, half-regal existence, she had only partially performed her functions. The time had now arrived when she had no calls upon her save those of the religious house she had founded and directed; she was deeply conscious of the fact. Within her cloister she was once more building up, for her own heart, a world which could only exist, as a world, within its own boundaries. The most saintly of her friends, in spite of themselves, would bring in visions of the past with them, and the bitter sadness, too, of the inevitable comparison between the sad but stately days of the closing reign and those she foresaw the Regency must bring. Aged and virtuous ladies might, in their charity, refrain from putting faith in the rumours scandal spread, yet, though they held their peace, their very silence would be heavy to bear. Of all her old-time guests, the one whose coming she most dreaded was the old Maréchal de Villeroy, who, in spite of the quashing of the King's will, was still the young King's Governor; he would arrive, full of long tales and tragic memories, to mourn the past and groan over the present.

He shook her, he wearied her, they would shed tears together. "He is more tragic," she wrote, "than Racine and Longepierre!" He would boast of the insulting precautions he took to prevent the Regent from approaching the little King, or saying a word to him in private. He took a delight in laying stress upon the gloomiest tales, and filling the sickly child under his charge with unhealthy terrors for his own safety. Incapable of self-restraint, or any realization of the virtue of that silence which was the source of all Madame de Maintenon's strength, he threw her into a most painful state of agitation. After his visits she would keep her bed, and pray more earnestly than ever to be spared all reference to the past.

She still wrote to her friends, though she refused to see them. The Marquise de Dangeau knew she was laying a finger on her tenderest spot when she addressed her thus: "As for me, it is a perpetual surprise that anybody should still care to be anything. Somebody was saying, the other day, that it seemed, since the King's death, as if the whisper had gone round to everyone, 'Great Pan is dead!'"

Yes! Great Pan was dead! Now he was gone, nothing remained to the woman who had been his shadow save to be content with her state of non-existence. "I thought we should end by not knowing what king was reigning!" The complaint drops from her pen after ten days or a fortnight have passed without her receiving any letters from the outer world. Yet she is uneasy about the reports that reach her of the Duc du Maine's intrigues. He is, he is always to be, the "weakness of her heart." "Have your two Marshals of France told M. le Duc du Maine he must not go and sit on a Council of War? . . . I am uneasy about M. le Duc du Maine, since I have heard he attends those councils. . . ." The Pretender to the English throne, too, has had himself proclaimed in Scotland. In spite of herself, these scraps of news disturb her; she would have been so thankful to be no more, now, than that plain daughter of the d'Aubignés, that dweller at Mursay, so practical and full of good works, writing her niece an old aunt's letters, once again, turning her back on all things else. "I send all the people who come here to inquire for me back to you," she writes to Madame de Caylus, "to avoid the trouble of sending messengers; their numbers will diminish!" While she lived in the world, she had not belonged to it; now, in her cloister, she is not altogether of the cloister: that is her fate.

And further, the mystery that hung over her marriage forced her into solitude. How was she to pour out her unacknowledged mourning to friends who had been the witnesses of all her past life? There was a last, a noble faithfulness in her vow of solitude.

Little by little, the borders of her life grew narrower, and with that contradiction so frequent in our human feelings, she wondered, as the limits of the encircling boundary she herself had traced around her solitude grew more fixed, to find the long days in the convent seem so dull and barren. She had longed for peace, but once rid of the suffering born of the agitations of the outside world, she learned to know that supreme temptation of the cloister, tedium. With great simplicity, she admits it to her niece: "I try to occupy myself." And again, laughing at the long letters she writes with her own hand, "This packet will show you, my dear niece, that I have acquired the convent taste for intercourse with the outer world!" "It is true," she adds, "that my loneliness is very great; I often pretend to have business that obliges me to shut myself up, and I take a pleasure in being in nobody's way. I write my own letters, and make up my own packets." At Versailles, she never wrote with her own hand! Mademoiselle d'Aumale was always there, to take down the words so rapidly dictated by that low voice; she had no need, in those days, to pretend she had business to do!

Never did the recluse waver in her resolve to live in solitude. The woman who had once ruled and supported her daughters at Saint-Cyr now deprecated trifling attentions which might prolong the existence of a useless shadow. At six every morning, punctually, she was to be seen at the nuns' special Mass. She suffered from the winter cold in the long corridors, lighted by glimmering torches, which she had to traverse on her way to chapel. Mass over, she went into the class-rooms, delivered short lectures to the pupils, read them little dialogues full of precise and simple moral teaching, which she would compose in her own room. Then she would make her way back to her apartments, spend long moments on her knees, reopen the Bishop of Chartres' innumerable letters of advice, and, to beguile the weariness of the closing hours of her day, she would sit in her room, looking ever thinner and more worn in her black gown, and work at her tapestry, or plait laces which she sent to her niece and her niece's friends—a crafty suggestion that they should fight against soft habits, and wear *des corps.*

Then Madame de Glapion, the tender-hearted, now Superioress of the convent, would come knocking at her door, and on pretext of some needed advice would inveigle her into one of those confidential talks in the course of which Madame would open her heart a little, and distil, drop by drop, some revelation of the doings of her younger days, to be received and recorded with religious care. At eight o'clock at night, after her dinner with Mademoiselle d'Aumale, Madame would go back to the chapel to take part in the evening devotions of the Community. When, kneeling in her stall, she saw the nuns and the young girls file into chapel, and listened to their voices raised in prayer, she felt as though she were the grandmother of that innocent family; it was her work; and then the languid hours of old age, cheered so seldom, now, and so irregularly, by the breath of the spirit, seemed less dreary to her. After prayers were over, there was still a long evening to get through; Mademoiselle d'Aumale was always at hand, ready to play a game of backgammon. The nuns, too, would ask leave to come in; but at nine o'clock, when curfew rang, their old mother always insisted that the rule should be obeyed, and she be left alone. Then she would try to say her rosary, but that was always difficult to her. She had a little girl, whom she was bringing up, to sleep in her room—a little creature for her to cherish; the child's soft slumber was like a breath of life in the long silence of the night.

In 1716, Madame de Dangeau sent her Dangeau's manuscript journal to amuse her. She perused it " with pleasure." She was grateful to Dangeau for having gathered up the ashes of the bygone days. She herself looked at them without visible emotion or regret. Between June 17th and June 24th she read the three first volumes; on July 9th she asked Madame de Caylus for the fourth and fifth, adding, " the memoirs still amuse me." " I do not think I am doing wrong," she says, " by having them read to me by Mademoiselle d'Aumale. She would like to note down certain things in them, such as some that concern me, and the dates of some principal matters. I address myself to you to obtain this permission, if you think it proper, and so that he may feel less difficulty about refusing." And on July 28th she sends back the eighty-seventh volume with this bare comment only, " You will send me another, if Monsieur de Dangeau consents."

To what extent was this calm and silent temper of mind due to a will that she had ruled and mortified? What, again, was the proportion of it to be ascribed to her own nature? She reads the seven and eighty volumes through without allowing a word to escape her lips. She is present as a spectator at the Arabian Nights Entertainment of her own extraordinary past; this death to the world is more than a desire, then, it is a vow, a promise left in hands that bind her still. The memory she desires to preserve is enshrined in the annals of Saint-Cyr. Over that memory she watches. The Ladies note down the familiar conversations of successive evenings; she looks through them, and makes her meaning clear; they contain her final teachings. Her corrections are still to be seen in the great books. There is something touching in the sight of this old grandmother of eighty years preparing the elements of her own history, and the survival of her teachings, for her chosen children, while, with her own hand, she casts the memory of her bygone splendours into the limbo of oblivion. One evening

Mademoiselle d'Aumale saw her take a number of packets of short notes the King had written her, out of her casket, look for a moment at the large regular characters, and throw them all into the fire, saying to her companion, "Now it is out of my power to prove that I was on good terms with the King!" That was her last act of obedience to her vow. To posterity she leaves nought, save her conversations with her daughters, and these very daughters, unfaithful and imprudent, were to make over secretly, and into a stranger's hands, the manuscripts so dutifully collected by the Ladies of Saint-Cyr, to which La Baumelle was to add the dry and worldly-minded letters that have left a debasing and unjust stain upon the character of a noble woman.

She had begged the Princesse des Ursins to burn all the letters she had written her. Little was now left, so she believed, except a correspondence on spiritual subjects that would never pass beyond the privacy of cloistered communities, and some family letters. And indeed she took care to ask her niece, the Duchesse de Noailles, to send her back the letters she had written to her brother, and effaced from them the somewhat tart expressions of her own opinion of the "little Paris gossip." Yes; she did take measures to secure the effect she desired her figure should produce upon posterity, but she did it after the manner of a mother whose heart is set on leaving the essential strength of her affection, the purified essence of her thoughts, to those who are most near and dear to her. When, as an old woman of eighty-two, she burned those papers in her fireplace at Saint-Cyr, she did not do it, as has been asserted, to get rid of letters written by her lovers. Mademoiselle d'Aumale tells us the King's notes were all burnt; that was a final act of obedience to a religious vow of silence. Had he not himself destroyed Madame de Maintenon's last notes, as he lay on his death-bed? Had he not gone through his private papers with her? It was for themselves they had been man and wife, and not for history; and with her own hands she effaced the traces of her footsteps upon the long road of the monarch's life.

Thus, in the inward peace so welcome to her soul, three years rolled by. Her last contact with the great ones of this world occurred when the Tsar, travelling as the Comte du Nord, paid her a visit. Saint-Simon has left a fanciful account of the visit, based on mere hearsay, with which everybody is acquainted. Here is the little-known description given, when the incident occurred, by Madame de Maintenon herself.

"Just a moment ago, Monsieur Gabriel came in to tell me Monsieur de Bellegarde sends me word that he, that is to say, the Tsar, would like to come here after dinner, if I am willing. I did not dare to say No, and I shall wait for him on my bed. I am not told anything more; I do not know whether I ought to go and receive him with ceremony, whether he desires to see the house, the young girls, if he will go into the choir—I am leaving everything to chance."

She continues her letter in the evening: "The Tsar arrived at seven o'clock; he sat down beside my bed, and had me asked whether I was ill. I answered that I was. He had me asked the nature of my illness; I replied, 'A great age, with a somewhat weak constitution.' He did not know what to say to me, and his interpreter did not seem to hear me; his visit was very short; he is still in the house, but where, I do not know."

So far we can easily imagine what the visit of the Northern Potentate must have been to this French relic of a bygone century. The Comte du Nord would appear to have been stupefied by the sight of a countenance which the Ladies of Saint-Cyr always describe as having been full of an infinite dignity. All he was capable of doing was to murmur a few extremely husky words, and the interpreter, says Mademoiselle d'Aumale, who was present, had to eke out the visitor's very scanty compliments with a few of his own invention; in every age, well-trained interpreters have been heard to supplement the inadequate civilities of their employers. The strangest fancy of all was that related by Madame de Maintenon herself, at the close of her letter. "I was forgetting to tell you that the Tsar had the foot of my bed opened a little, so that he might see me. You may imagine he was granted satisfaction." It is probable that the Tsar, feeling some curiosity, gave a somewhat rapid order in the Russian tongue, in obedience to which the hangings round the bed were opened. This was a vexation to the old lady; she reddened a little, says Mademoiselle d'Aumale, but beyond a melancholy, scornful little smile at her own appearance, she made no sign.

She lived for two years more, in a solitude that was more jealously guarded every day. She would plead her cook's poor skill, so that the Duchesse de Noailles might not stay to dinner, when she came to see her. The Duc du Maine was the only person whose visits still continued; he told her his misfortunes, the persecutions that assailed him. He drew her attention to the Bed of Justice shortly to be held, at which the vote of the Regent's Council was to strip him of the signal favours the King his father had bestowed on him. But the Duchesse du Maine never showed her face at Saint-Cyr. She stayed at Sceaux, little doll stuffed with deviltry that she was, and hatched her plots. She had openly declared, in the King's lifetime, that when people had once been made eligible for the succession to the throne, they should set fire to the four corners of the kingdom sooner than lose it. And what she could, she did. She it was who kept up dealings with Spain, shared Cellamare's dream of overthrowing the Regent and calling in Philippe V. But all Madame de Maintenon saw in the lame man who came knocking at her door was the fidelity of the King's darling son, who was paying, now, for the affection he had been able to inspire; those who were hounding the bastard out of his positions were really persecuting the memory of the King.

The Cellamare conspiracy and the Duc du Maine's incarceration at Doullens fell on her not so much like a thunderbolt —there are no such things as thunderbolts for old people with one foot already in their graves—as like a crowning reason for her own departure.

The startling news was transmitted to Saint-Cyr by the Maréchal de Villeroy on December 17, 1718, enclosed in a letter addressed to Madame de Glapion. The friends were sitting together when the messenger arrived. Madame de Glapion broke the seal, and held out the letter intended for her to her aged companion. Instantly, and without a word, Madame de Maintenon rose to her feet and went to the chapel. There she remained for an hour. Madame de Glapion joined her, and found her absorbed in prayer.

That evening Madame de Maintenon had a shivering fit. She asked no questions, contented herself with what the Maréchal had told her in his letter, took to her bed; she began to cough; she lingered all through the winter. Those about her, seeing her so pallid and shivering, tried the effect of some trivial alterations in the arrangement of her room; even the curtains drawn round her bed did not stop the violent shivering; screens were added to the curtains. She said, " Nothing but my death can justify all the trouble I am giving you ! "

As soon as she realized her danger, she set her excellent clear intelligence to work to put her business affairs—in other words, her charities—in order. It was a pleasure to her to think she would be found, after her death, with empty hands. To each of her *protégées* she sent a quarterly payment of the pension she had promised her: she said, " It has been a great satisfaction to me to think that, as I have always paid my pensions in advance, I shall be doing some charity even after I am dead." Then her mind turned to her will. She made it with the little girl she had brought up in her own room, little Mademoiselle de la Tour; they turned it into a game, and their two wills were laid away in the same casket. Her reasonable nature welcomed the long-awaited end with a real joy; her faith was quite unclouded. She drew up a statement of her last wishes, read it over, and with a sort of delicate delight in her own poverty, said jokingly to Mademoiselle d'Aumale, " It would be better to make no will at all than to make one like mine ! Better not give anything at all than give so little as I !—two thousand *livres* to one, three thousand to another, a thousand to a third, people will laugh at it ! My will does not seem to be like a will!" And then she struck out the solemn-sounding expression "will," and wrote above it, "Arrangements as to what I own"; and as her state of health grew worse and worse, she had Mademoiselle de la Tour's childish will taken out of the casket.

Madame de Glapion never left her now. On April 14th a violent thunderstorm broke over Saint-Cyr; even behind her damask curtains the sick woman seemed to feel the commotion of the elements. She grew restless; she received the communion; she still had some factitious strength, but it was fever that fed the fire in her black eyes and the red flush on her thin cheeks. She seemed surprised at seeing Madame de Glapion, her faithful d'Aumale, her physician, gathered about her bed. "Is it because I am at the point of death that you are all there?" she inquired.

For many a day she had been ready to enter into her rest. The wayfarer was weary of her long laborious pilgrimage. After she had received the last sacrament of all she whispered to Mademoiselle d'Aumale, "I have a passionate love for Extreme Unction!" She was departing without a fear or a regret, delivered, as she had been long since, from any instinctive clinging to life. Madame de Caylus was with her, the Duchesse de Noailles came to her bedside. The Duc de Noailles kissed her hand, and inquired, with automatic politeness, "how she did?" She answered him quite simply, "Pretty well." The only time she showed a symptom of resistance was when her confessor bade her give her blessing to her daughters. "I am not worthy," she replied. He pressed her, and she raised her hand in a farewell gesture of affection. She died in her sleep. Gathered round her bed, her children watched her pass away. On April 16th, at five o'clock, she breathed her last.

Her daughters dressed her in her black gown; they watched her for two days, while she lay in state in her own room. In life, in all her trial, they had loved her; she still belonged to them. No other persons except her two nieces, Madame de Caylus and Madame de Noailles, entered the quiet sanctuary where she lay dead. Not a soul came from Versailles; this was as she would have had it. Her resting-place was ready for her, a slab had been lifted in the pavement of the church within which she had so often prayed.

On the 17th her coffin was carried from her bedroom to the vault. All those she had loved, and who were still of this world, were present. The nuns were her pall-bearers; the young girls, two hundred and fifty of them, followed her, bearing lighted tapers (it was evening time). Thus attended by the youthful procession, she passed for the last time, on her bier, into the choir. The Ladies and the pupils, says Mademoiselle d'Aumale, were quite unable to chant the Office for the Dead, sobs choked their utterance; the Superior of the Missionary Fathers had sent for thirty clerks, who sang the psalms she had loved best, in their full voices. There was no funeral sermon; that might have touched the mystery of her life. It was just the funeral of an aged mother, borne by her weeping children to rest in her last home.

Let us leave the dead woman to her sorrowing daughters, and hear what is being said at Versailles. Old Madame forthwith intones her own particular mourning hymn: "The old slut went off at Saint-Cyr," she writes, "between four and five o'clock on Saturday last. The blame for her death must be laid on a thunderstorm which drove in the measles from which she was suffering." And Madame's pen at once performs a characteristically German dance around her "mortal enemy's" corpse. "The old witch had had Louvois poisoned because he opposed the declaration of her marriage; the sums the Noailles, her nephew and niece, inherit are enormous, but nobody knows the amount of what she has hidden;" "she had debauched the Duchesse de Bourgogne;" "that wicked old devil Fagon had poisoned the Queen, so as to ensure the old woman's fortune."

Already we recognize the two legends, each of them complete—the black legend, and the golden—one travels up and down the world and feeds the pamphlets, and entertains the Dilections of Germany; the other, born at Saint-Cyr, lives on there still; the worship of her memory endures, and eighty years after her death, Madame de Maintenon is still the tutelary divinity of the valley. When evening falls, the nuns of the community open the great books into which all things have been transcribed and copied: her precepts, her confidential talks, her letters to the Abbé Gobelin and the Bishop of Chartres. As long as she had been able to do it, Madame de Glapion had read the teachings they longed to assimilate aloud to them; the novices, listening with heads bent in reverence for a noble memory, drank in the words.

Madame's blue damask hangings and furniture, her bed, at the foot of which a little picture of the King hung below a crucifix, were still kept in her room; her travelling-bed, covered with crimson damask, stood in the room adjoining. In the bookcases, the prayer-books whose leaves her fingers had so often turned were still ranged behind the lattices, the bookmarks in them just as she had left them. In the great Hall of the convent, the portrait of "the King," as he was always called there, faced by that of the Foundress, still watched over the Chapter meetings. The Superioress herself gave way before the figure of her who was thenceforth called *La Regina*, the Queen who had passed beyond the veil. In every class her doctrines were inculcated faithfully. The pupils' dress was still as she had chosen it. An illustrious visitor to Saint-Cyr would come on twenty portraits of Madame de Maintenon in the class-rooms, he would listen with astonishment to the fine classic methods of expression, the politeness, already somewhat old-fashioned, which was to serve as an armour for those sensitive young hearts. When Horace Walpole came, the pupils acted dialogues written by their Foundress to entertain him, and sang him airs composed by Lully. For Maria Leczinska they played Esther, and then Athalie, and Racine's son came to teach them the traditional rendering of their parts, while the son of Clérembault the organist accompanied the choruses. Saint-Cyr lived, as it were, under a spell; Time seemed to flow past, there, like a river, leaving no trace behind.

For the populace of France, meanwhile, Time was flying by, hurrying to the period of the great convulsions; but the only revolution known to the Ladies of Saint-Cyr was that of the revolving years, and all they asked of it was to bring them back to their starting-point, back to the face they loved. "It seems," writes the Chevalier de Boufflers in 1791, "as if each nun had taken her orders from her, as if everything were directed by her voice." The community had known perfection, had embraced it, clung to it.

That was what she had most desired: to survive herself at Saint-Cyr. In the world, she believed herself to be, she really was, a forgotten shadow, a corpse; she took no precautions against that. And yet, if she had chosen, her faithful friend Dangeau would have set her in a high place in his patient records of the King's daily doings, and if he did it not, we may well believe it was because she had forbidden it. She was so completely forgotten, thirty years after her death, that la Baumelle had no materials for the beginning of his life of Madame de Maintenon, and knew not where to apply for any. Agrippa's Protestant descendants, with whom he had been acquainted at Geneva, knew nothing about their distant cousin. It was not till Racine's son was seized with a fancy to possess furs from the North, and teas from Asia, and exchanged certain manuscripts he had inherited from his father for these commodities, that Madame de Maintenon's first historian contrived to lay his hand on anything at all, and then, realizing how little he had to go upon, appealed to Saint-Cyr, and, finding what he could get there insufficient, built up the rest on hearsay evidence.

The common people, filled with the fury of the Revolution, only knew—and that in the dimmest fashion—the evil legend. In January, 1794, after the Ladies of Saint-Louis had been driven out, some workmen employed in pulling down the chapel came on a black marble slab in the middle of the choir. They prised it up, went down into the vault, dragged out the coffin, broke it open. They saw the corpse of Madame de Maintenon fully dressed, and perfectly preserved, thanks to the action of aromatic drugs. They looked at the sleeping face, shaded by the white hair and the black laces. They pulled the corpse out of the coffin, tied a rope round the neck, dragged it into the gardens, stripped it, and cast it into a hole in the graveyard.

There it was found by watchful friends, who took it away, and sheltered it under a monument raised, this time, in the garden facing her former dwelling, and shaded by weeping willows. Once more her body was expelled, and by men who fancied themselves liberal, perhaps, but who refused to leave " that fanatic who had brought about the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes " to be watched, and even wept, by so much as a willow-tree. It was left to a General commanding at Saint-Cyr, whose clemency—or kindheartedness—was greater than his predecessor's, to restore the corpse of the Foundress to the refuge she had sought; he brought her back into the chapel where she had so often knelt in prayer, and there, at last, her body rests.

The dark legend is dead indeed. Voltaire was clear-sighted beyond most men, and he, thanks to what he knew and what he guessed, unhesitatingly set this great female figure in her rightful place, when he wrote his *Siècle de Louis XIV*. But the outrageous sneers, the coarse or comic epithets, had amused the world in general, and it was somewhat loath to give them up. Nay, even nowadays, if you should ask a person of independent mind what he thinks of Madame de Maintenon, you will see him begin by smiling—if not a Gaulic, at all events a very Gallic—smile: that conjugal mystery tickles the palate of the curious and ironic mind. Press him still further, and almost always you will receive the same reply, " Madame de Maintenon? She doesn't stir one's sympathy ! "

That is the somewhat hasty judgment of our own day. A sort of irritation is inspired by the veiled figure that once exclaimed, " I shall be a riddle to the whole world ! " To those who seek to discover the truth about her nature as it is mirrored in her correspondence, she appears cold-hearted, ardent-minded, passionate in her attachment to the noblest and healthiest doctrines that have shed their light upon the genius of France. By the perspicacity of her views, by her obstinate stand against the dangerous " torrent of custom," she was in advance of her own times, she foresaw ours. Though her individuality may have been enigmatic, her mind, as we see it, is clear, sincere, unchanging. It is always the same mind, in Scarron's lodging, in the King's palace, at Saint-Cyr. What was it, then, she lacked, to stir our sympathy? It may have been that gift of loving others that always reaps its own reward. The only persons she loved with her whole heart were those on whom she had succeeded in inculcating her ideals. Can it then be that she loved nothing but her own ideas? There was something almost intolerant about the sincerity of her mind. The most correct judgment of her is that we find formulated in the words of the Duc de Bourgogne, " She is a genuine woman."

The veil once lifted, we note the grave, clear glance that sees through the mists of every illusion, and the melancholy, touched with the bitterness caused by the faults of those she has sworn to serve, which has so often whispered warnings, sad and prophetic, in her ears. Never did the pride of that intelligence bow down before the greatest of her world. " I would like," she once wrote, " to tell our princes the hardest truths, and serve them afterwards, till my last breath ! " This, truly, is what Agrippa had once called a " blunt fidelity ! "

Have we rendered this figure sympathetic to you? Let us not deceive ourselves! We shall think we have done it justice if the reader, laying down this book, can see Madame de Maintenon, for a moment, as we have endeavoured to depict her—sympathetic, perhaps, unsympathetic, it may be, but upright, in any case, austere, faithful, as Truth itself.

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